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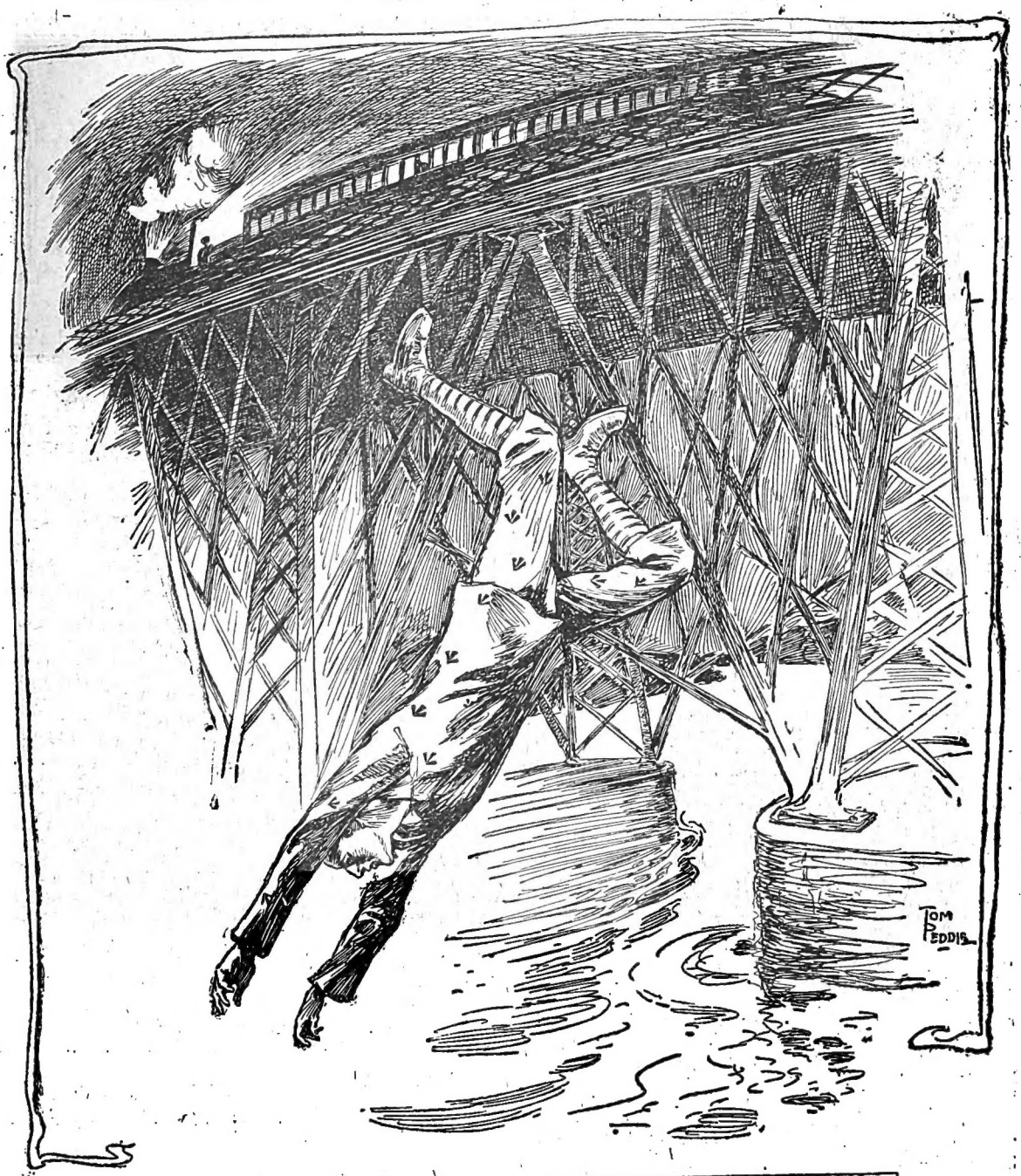
SHORT STORIES.

No. 638.] For the Week Ending October 19th, 1901. [ONE PENNY.

DEAD TO THE WORLD.



There is a splash down there below! Then he springs back on to the footboard, back into the carriage.

(See the new serial on next page.)

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New Serial Begins To-day.

DEAD TO THE WORLD

By Henry T. Johnson.

Author of "Cruce Vincit," "The Pride of the Ring," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

The Man Hunt.

"We've got him now! Stand or I'll fire!" shouts the warder first in the flight of the man hunted.

But the figure in drab presses on, panting, distressed, done up as he is.

"Stand!" another warder calls, but the quarry staggers on through the wet long grass.

"There's the railway—he'll be getting on to the line, then Lord knows what might happen!"

"Let him have it then!"

Bang! The mists quiver, shaken by the rifle shot. The man who is making so desperate a dash for freedom staggers three more paces, then falls.

"Got him!" growls the warder, ejecting the cartridge, "His own fault!" Then, themselves a trifle blown and weary, they ease up a bit.

Which is a mistake. For a miss is as good as a mile, and though the bullet whistled within an inch of the prison-breaker's ear, it is exhaustion, not the bullet, that sends him down. He lies there in the long grass panting like a hard-pressed hare, listening to the shouts behind him nearer and nearer—terribly near.

Raising his head, he scans the landscape.

And something catches his eye. A speck that grows into a gleam. There in front of him, and, like the shouts behind him, drawing nearer—nearer.

And more quickly even than the shouts—on it comes swerving round the curve of the line.

Suddenly the hunted man springs up and dashes on again, and a startled shout goes up from the man-hunters.

There he goes straight for the dip on to the line, reaches the grassy bank, lies breathless a moment at the foot of the rails amid a clump of furze and scrub. Steadily that disc of light draws nearer—nearer, though the train slows down at this bend to half speed, the engine clanks and rattles past. Concentrating all his remaining strength into one desperate final effort, the hunted man clambers up the wooden rails, a frantic leap, he has clutched the bar of an open carriage window, hangs on to it like grim death as the train carries him along. For a moment he dangles helpless, then his toes find the footboard—a little later he fumbles for the carriage door handle.

The rest is easy. The train quickens up, swirls round the bend, the man-hunters come panting up—too late.

"I'll swear I hit him!" the warder who fired declares, more to console his vanity than for any other purpose.

"Wonder if he got across the line!" exclaims another.

"No," says a third emphatically, "he couldn't have got across in front of that train. Let's go down and look if he's been under it."

Meantime, the quarry who has so far baffled them, lifting up the arm rests, stretches himself on the luxurious cushions of the first-class carriage into which he has scrambled, for a while dead to the world, caring nothing, if, indeed, he knows anything beyond that he is as done up as a man need be. At last, however, the shrill scream of the engine whistle reminds him that, if for the moment free, he is by no means scot free. How is he to rid himself of his broad arrow branded garb, he vaguely wonders? But for the present this is a secondary matter, a more immediate crisis has to be faced.

They are nearing a station—who knows what may be awaiting him there—though his pursuers will hardly have had enough time to get back to the previous station and wire his escape, even if they knew the exact manner of it.

Anyway, out of abundance of caution, he dives under the seat just as the train dashes by the Claverton Junction signal-box, and, lying there in hiding, awaits events.

"Ding—ding—ding! Fast train for Euston!" But what a while they seem to be taking their seats; will the doors never cease banging, porters and guards never cease shouting, luggage trollies never cease rumbling—is the train ever going to start for that London they

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proclaim as its destination? So the escaped convict wonders lying there under the seat holding his breath, trying to hush the very beating of his heart.

At last the rumbling, the trundling, and the banging die away—the shouting changes to "Take your seats," then to "Stand aside there," as the guard's whistle trills.

Thank the stars! at last—at last the train is moving and they have left this carriage and the prison-breaker lying under its seat alone.

Then that shout, "Stand back!" rings out louder than before.

"I tell you I must catch it," a voice exclaims; "confound you! I will catch it!"

The handle clicks, the door swings open, the convict hears the sound of a scramble, then a substantial form flings itself on the seat above him.

CHAPTER II.

Exchange This Time Is Robbery.

"Phew! that was a close shave, mustn't do that again, not worth it—lots of trains—only one life."

Long afterwards the prison-breaker remembered that —"Only one life."

The newcomer sits back perspiring freely and panting heavily.

"Fool I was—to run like that—down the platform—after what Doctor Hall told me too—nuisance having to change—phew!"

He is so intent on mopping his shiny forehead, unbuttoning his coat and waistcoat, and fanning himself that he is oblivious of that set, determined face looking up at him from under the seat, of the dark eyes fixed on him with baleful concentration.

The man peering from under the seat is taking stock of him. Out of condition clearly—weak heart probably—he notes the substantial though not ostentatious jewellery—the fine linen—the good well-cut clothes. What would that long light overcoat not be worth to him now, and that soft felt hat? Fellow passenger is evidently a new arrival from abroad, passenger from Liverpool no doubt, changing at Claverton to catch the express.

He is badly blown, he'd be an easy handful to tackle—the sooner he's tackled the easier. Suddenly, swiftly a dark shadow stands between the newcomer and the light of the carriage window.

His breath comes and goes quicker than ever.

"Who are you—what's your game? Ah, I see—you're a convict; you've broken prison!"

He makes a dash for the communicator, but the other is too quick, has him by the throat, forces him back upon the seat.

With a rattle and a clatter the train plunges into a tunnel—as it were into the bowels of the earth—and now the prison-breaker has two hands at his victim's throat!

After a while the rattle ceases as though the train were a live thing and content to be again out under God's sky and in His open air.

The convict is looking at something lying down there against the opposite door—lying there quite still. He has got his heart's desire—that long, light overcoat rests on his shoulders now; the substantial jewellery besides a purse, a pocket book, and other things are in his pocket, the pockets of the garments he has stripped from the murdered man.

He has done his work very thoroughly, desperately, and deliberately—with that attention to detail which stamps the master of his craft. For instance, the inert leaden arms have been forced into the sleeves of the broad arrow-marked tunic, the exchange has been carried out even to the boots, which he has just finished lacing on the stiffening feet, so that only an insignificant bundle of surplus apparel remains there on the cushions.

Glancing through the window he sees his chance. The train has pulled up on the viaduct spanning the wide river Dass—only a low parapet with an iron rail, and there beyond stretches the silvery bosom of the river, now beginning to reflect the stars.

The convict opens the carriage door—lifts the inert form lying there so still. He is used to handling his fellow creatures, and a man of giant strength as many have known to their cost. Exerting all that strength, he lifts the inert, unconscious form down on to the parapet, gives it a swing—there is a splash down there below! Then he springs back on to the footboard, back into the carriage, pitches the bundle of remaining clothes over the parapet, and, opening his victim's handbag, ransacks its contents as the train swirls on.

Searches also the contents of that pocket-book, so that long before Euston is reached he has learned his victim's name, something of his history, his destination, and full particulars of his luggage.

And when the train at last pulls up, punctual to the half minute, at Euston, the man, who two hours ago was almost hunted down, secures that luggage, has it piled on a four-wheeled cab, in which he drives to the hotel mentioned in the correspondence he discovered in the handbag.

Furthermore, he is deferentially ushered to the rooms engaged by the victim whose clothes he is wearing.

Also whose name he has assumed.

Yes, for this is his plan. Cyril Roylance has come into his own!

And Richard Seldon, alias Tiger Dick, is from henceforth dead to the world. He has thought it out—he will work it out.

CHAPTER III.

The Course of True Love Never Did Run Smooth.

"Now, Jack, dear, you must go!"

"No, no, not yet, a few more moments, Doris!" And Jack Branscombe looks so appealingly down into the grey eyes of the girl, whose dimpled hands he holds, that she finds it harder than ever to be imperious.

For it is not for nothing that throughout the countryside folks call him Handsome Jack, and his face is tender and his eyes just now are soft with the lovelight of two or three and twenty.

"But Jack, Jack, it is getting so late. Listen how impatiently your horse is stamping and pawing, and consider, too, how impatiently my father will be fuming and wondering at my absence."

"Now, dearest little girl, you know as well as anybody that your stern parent always takes his forty winks over his crusted port and choice Havana after dinner."

"And then wakes up, fuming and fretful till I go to the piano and play and sing him back into geniality, and I'm sure he's awake and fuming now, and if I don't go back directly he'll get into a dreadful temper and he'll stamp and shout and very likely bring his gout on again."

"And oh!" she went on, a grave look shadowing her pretty face, "if he only knew that I was here at the lych gate keeping tryst with you and that I'd made my way here through that very panel and passage where the Sir Harry Harcourt Dale of 1650 hid King Charles II., he'd be so angry that—that something terrible would happen. Jack, dear, I don't think we ought to meet again; what's the good of it?"

"The good of it! Why this, dear, that I love you and I can't live without you, and you know that you love me a little." And he looks down into the dove-like eyes that cannot deny the impeachment, nor can those rosy lips, for he seals them into consenting silence with a kiss.

And at that moment a heavy footstep crashes through the crackling bracken, and out of the shadow of the nut-bushes strides Harcourt Dale, the Squire of Dalehurst,

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"No one in the world shall ever cry shame or blame on her. I love your daughter, sir!"

his iron-grey whiskers bristling and his face flaming redder than ever with fury.

"You here!" he exclaims angrily to his daughter, and then with tenfold wrath to her companion, "and you. I've been suspecting something of this kind, only that I couldn't believe my child capable of deceit."

"But father," pleaded Doris, "Jack's way lies along the lane and—and—"

"And you," thundered the Squire, "made your way along the coppice. Shame on you, Doris Dale!"

"No, no!" cried Jack Branscombe, "no one in the world shall cry shame or blame on her. It is true I begged her, implored her, to meet me at the lych gate, vowed that if not here I would seek her elsewhere. I love your daughter, sir, with a love as pure and constant as a man ever cherished for a maid. It is well that the truth should be told."

"You love my daughter, you—Jack Branscombe, a mere yeoman farmer."

"A yeoman farmer," said the other proudly, "and my calling is my pride."

"Well then, once for all, let this folly cease. I forbid you to approach my daughter; I absolutely interdict any communication between you. Doris, return to the house; and you, sir, leave my premises, and remember, if you are found trespassing again upon them I will have you dealt with accordingly."

"Father!" the girl cried pitifully; then to the other, "Jack! Jack!" and the yearning tender tone she spoke in fell upon his heart like balm, soothing the angry passion the other's words had awakened, so that he forgot taunt and insult, remembering only that it was her father who stood before him.

"I will leave your premises," he said proudly, "but I tell you once again that I love your daughter, she loves me, and not all the fathers on earth, nor all the forces of earth shall stand twixt her and me. I know you scorn my pretensions. You, the landed squire, look down on me, the yeoman farmer whose ancestors have for years paid rent and fine for copyhold to yours. But I tell you that the day shall be when you shall repent your angry words, and you, who order me to leave your lands, shall call me across your threshold. Good-bye, Doris, and remember I love you and I trust you always."

Turning on his heel, he vaulted the lych gate, strode along towards where his horse awaited him, flung himself into the saddle, and soon, at a pelting trot, was speeding along the lanes to his farmhouse home.

He had spoken wildly, at random. He could not have given authority or foundation for his words, and yet, somehow, in his heart of hearts he felt confident that in due time his prophecy would be fulfilled.

Doris followed her father without a word through the nut coppice leading to the shrubberies, and so on across the level sward to the Grange. Once within doors her emotion overmastered her and she burst into tears. When the passion of her outburst was over, her father, with a quiet sternness unusual to him, said deliberately:

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"Now understand me, this nonsense is at an end, once for all."

"But, father," she cried, "I love him, I shall never love anyone else."

An impatient exclamation broke from him, then in a somewhat kindlier tone he said:

"Listen to me, Doris. Romance affects people at your age and his, just as measles at an earlier period. A girl in your station of life has to consider other matters besides her inclination, property has its responsibilities as well as its privileges. And, by the bye, I have news for you. Cyril Roylance has returned to England and is expected at the Hall at any moment."

Doris instinctively felt an unaccountable chill as these words fell, not only upon her ears, but, as it seemed, upon her heart. They brought to mind an old tale she had heard from the servants and the village gossips. Of how her father and Rupert Roylance, the late master of the Hall, sitting over their wine after dinner, had, some said in jest, others in earnest, made a bargain, that the seven-year-old heir to the Hall should, in years to come, espouse the baby heiress of the Grange.

Since then many things had happened. Rupert Roylance had entered into many vast and rash speculations, ruin had been the result: the estate, which was entailed, was mortgaged to the hilt as far as lay in his power. Taking his little lad, then a fragile, weedy ten-year-old, he had sailed for foreign lands, no one, not even himself, being certain of his destination. The rents of the estate had been for years collected by receivers for the mortgagees, the Hall itself being let to strangers.

Years later news had arrived of Rupert Roylance, who had literally and metaphorically "struck oil," and together with the news came heavy remittances, reducing the mortgages on the estate; then more remittances, until at last the estates were cleared and Morgan Chandler went on managing them, not as receiver for the mortgagees, but as duly appointed steward and factotum for Rupert Roylance.

Later still, came news of Rupert Roylance's death, then a little while later intelligence that his son and heir, Cyril Roylance, was on his way to England to take up his abode in his ancestral home, the tenancy of which happened to have some months previously expired.

And on hearing this news Squire Harcourt Dale had bethought himself of the bargain and the betrothal made by himself and his old friend and neighbour, perhaps in jest, perhaps in earnest. But many a true word was spoken in jest, and from every point of view what an admirable alliance it would be. Doris was just on twenty, Cyril would be a man of twenty-seven; the estates ran together, and, amalgamated, would form the finest in the county; certain intricate questions as to rights of way and other easements, such as will occur between large and contiguous estates, would be set at rest. Oh! the match would be most eligible. As to the inclinations of the parties principally concerned Harcourt Dale declined to take such unimportant matters into consideration. It was a bargain. There were times, as, for instance, when Rupert Roylance had gone forth from his ancestral home practically penniless, when Harcourt Dale had affected to treat that bargain as one begun and to be ended in idle jesting, now he looked upon it as one to be regarded, and, if possible, to be carried out in earnest.

CHAPTER IV.

The New Squire.

Fallowfield village was a-quiver with excitement, for within the hour the new master of Fallowfield Hall was expected to drive through, *en route* for the home of his ancestors. And, as the old gossips declared, the place would seem itself again with a Roylance ruling at the Hall. And no little proportion of the enthusiasm was due to the reflection that the reign, or, rather, the regency of Morgan Chandler was rapidly approaching its close, a regency long to be bitterly remembered by reason of many an act of spiteful, petty tyranny; the newcomer might turn out to be a harsh master, a hard landlord, he could scarcely prove harder or harsher than Morgan Chandler.

Meantime, up there at the Hall itself the individual in question sat in one of the apartments of the steward's offices brooding over a number of account books.

"It's all over at last," he soliloquised. "Well, I've made a pretty good thing out of it, and I can't grumble. I should have feathered my nest pretty snugly if I'd been content to let well and the Stock Echange alone."

"But suppose the new chap's very clever at figures? Well, it'll take him time enough and it'll give him work enough to find out anything from these," he chuckled grimly, turning over the pages of one of the ledgers. "They've passed the lawyers, and I fancy they'll get by him. Hallo! what do you want?"

This last remark was addressed to a man, who, after respectfully knocking, had shambled into the room and stood there dangling his hat with one hand, while with the other he tugged deferentially at his forelock.

"Axin' pardon, Measter Chandler," he said hesitatingly, "I made so bold as to coom to ax if I canna stay in t'owd cottage a bit longer."

"Not a minute after your time's up, Ned Fletcher, and that's Saturday. I'll have no poachers on the estate. I know all about you, you're sly enough not to be caught, but I know who sets wires in the plantations and nightlines in the Park Water, and out you go, bag and baggage."

"It's 'ard lines on a man, sir, to be turned out of house and home, all for suspicion."

"Suspicion be hanged! Everybody knows you're a poacher, though nobody's been quite sharp enough to catch you redhanded. Don't waste my time—get out!"

And the abashed, unsuccessful appellant shuffled out of the room muttering protests against being turned on the roadside for perhaps once in a while picking up a stray rabbit.

A little later, lusty shouts at the Hall gates heralded the approach of the carriage bearing the new master of the old mansion home. A few minutes more and Morgan Chandler stood before him in the Hall's huge portico with a totally different expression of manner and feature to that which he had displayed towards the poacher, the new arrival eyeing him meantime, steadily, taking the measure of his man, the man most likely to make or mar his game.

Later in the day they were closeted together a considerable time over books and schedules, Morgan Chandler rendering an account of his stewardship. The new master of Fallowfield Hall went carefully through every detail of account, putting from time to time questions which his agent found somewhat difficult to answer. And when the conference was over, and the master of the Hall sat alone in his library still poring over books and vouchers, he sprang suddenly from his seat, took a cigar from the box and lighting it deliberately, muttered in an undertone:

"You're a liar, Mr. Morgan Chandler, and you're a hypocrite; of that I was certain immediately I clapped eyes on you, but I think you're something else. I'm pretty certain, Mr. Chandler, you're a thief. So much the better for my game. Hullo, what's the matter?"

A manservant, entering, announced that the man Fletcher had returned to the Hall and begged for a few minutes audience with the new Squire.

"What does he want?" asked the other sharply.

"I expect, sir, he's on the same errand as this morning, asking to be allowed to stop in his cottage. Mr. Chandler means to clear him out for poaching."

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"Ask him in," said the other, and in a few minutes Fletcher, again dangling his hat and tugging at his forelock, stood in the presence of the new squire, making his appeal.

"So you thought you'd come direct to Cæsar?" said the latter, eyeing him steadily. "I've heard of your case from Chandler."

"He's always had his knife in me," said the man sullenly.

"Probably," said the other; "men who have got to take care of property generally have their knives in folks of your sort. Now, listen to me. It's abundantly clear, my friend, that you're an inveterate and a desperate poacher. You'd think no more of knocking over a hare than you would of smoking a pipe, and if one of my men interrupted you, if he were alone, you'd think no more of knocking him over than the hare. You're a bit of a drunkard and you're a quarrelsome bully. Don't tell lies, I tell you you are"—for the man had begun to mutter a protest.

"Now," the Squire went on, "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to keep you on in the cottage and I'm going to give you a job as a sort of night watchman and under-keeper."

The man started, astounded, scarce able to believe his ears.

"Now clear out," the Squire went on, "and, remember, I'm the man here now, you've got to work for me. Work for me thoroughly, discreetly, and quietly. I'll make it worth your while; deceive me, play me false, and you'll wish you'd never been born," and the man quailed before the sudden gleam in his new master's eye.

He shuffled out of the room muttering protestations of eternal fidelity, and the new Squire of Fallowfield, puffing meditatively at his cigar, remarked sententiously:

"That's the man for me; set a thief to catch a thief," then with a chuckle, "by Jingo! they haven't caught me," and once again he scanned the morning paper containing an account of the mysterious discovery of a dead body floating in the Dass, clad in convict garb, and believed to be identical with one Richard Seldon, commonly known as "Tiger Dick," who had some ten days previously effected an escape from Brimington Convict Prison, though the features of the man found in the Dass were unrecognisable.

CHAPTER V.

Favours.

The Fallowfield Agricultural Show was in full swing. The population of the country side, male and female, rich and poor, gentle and simple, flocked within its enclosure to inspect broad and mossy backed sheep, prize oxen, champion swedes and turnips, to watch ploughing matches, to gaze upon the glories of feminine attire as well as on much personal feminine loveliness, and to listen to the sweet sound discoursed by a smart regimental band. Spick and span turn-outs abounded, one of the smartest, the splendidly-horsed dogcart driven by Doris, who, nattily attired in a smart tailor-made tweeds and a driving coat, with a straw hat, attracted the admiring glances of all beholders. Of one especially, this one a man with dark, flashing eyes and a black moustache shadowing a somewhat hard mouth, riding a somewhat showy thoroughbred, and riding him well.

Doris for a moment drooped her eyes before the bold flash of the unknown dark ones. A moment or two later her father was standing beside her wheel, leading that showy thoroughbred.

"Doris, dear, this is Mr. Cyril Roylance. Cyril, though you may remember her, you wouldn't have recognised her, eh?"

"Hardly," said the other, raising his hat, "seeing that when I left England Miss Dale was a charming child, and I return to find a still more charming, grown up, young lady."

At that moment Jack Branscombe rode by. Ignoring her father's haughty stare, he, saluting Doris, darted at her a look which spoke worlds, and she answered it with another equally eloquent, and her new acquaintance noted the exchange of glances with a tightening of the hard mouth.

"Isn't it rather strange for you," she asked, "returning to England after living practically all your life down under?"

"It is a trifle strange," he said, "but very pleasant. It's the fulfilment of a dream cherished for years this return from exile." Then he went on: "And only to think that you were once the tiny baby girl riding in a basket pannier, whose pony I used to lead along the lanes. What a dear little mite you were!"

Cyril Roylance and Doris had been children together; the children of old friends and neighbours, the children, aye, the children and great grandchildren of old friends and neighbours. It was not surprising, therefore, that Doris should, after that first strange thrill, greet the new arrival on his return to his home and homeland with unaffected cordiality.

But poor Jack Branscombe, with love's pain in his heart, watched her with a jealous shadow in his eyes.

"Ah! now I see," he muttered bitterly, "why her father wanted the coast left clear. It's a long time since the Israelites sojourned in the wilderness, but the worship of the golden calf hasn't gone out of fashion yet."

Then, putting spurs into his horse, he galloped him into the open space reserved for the jumping competition, for he was showing him.

A clapping of hands rattled round the enclosure as, having cleared two or three hurdles in his horse's stride, Jack put him straight at the wall of wooden bricks, clearing it like a bird, and an enthusiastic "Bravo!" went up as he negotiated cleverly a tricky "in and out" jump, and when finally, with a shake of the reins, he rode him at the water jump, a spontaneous cheer told him that the good horse had cleared.

The other competitors ruefully noted the approving glances and significant nods of the judges there in the centre, and a murmur went round, "Handsome Jack's got the red rosette—just his luck!"

But there was one more competitor still remained, and a hearty cheer arose as the new Squire of Fallowfield rode into the enclosure. He, too, took his jumps beautifully cleanly, and the sleek, graceful animal he rode, charmed every lover of horseflesh as a perfect picture of a thoroughbred.

"By Jove!" said one young farmer, "it's going to be a near thing; Jack might get only the blue after all."

He came at the water jump at a rush, and then—oh! fatal mischance—just at the take-off he slightly slipped on a patch of broken ground cut up by previous competitors, jumped short, and landed up to his hind fetlocks in the water.

As it was he got the blue rosette, but he muttered an oath as he watched one of the judges attach the red on to Jack Branscombe's bridle, for, his dark eyes scanning the arena, he noted one dainty handkerchief fluttering in what seemed to him the daintiest, nattiest gloved hand in the world.

Jack Branscombe had not only won the red rosette, but he was first favourite for another prize, a prize the new Squire of Fallowfield meant if he could to win, namely, the love of Doris Dale.

There are black sheep in every fold, and even among the simple country folk gathered round that arena there lurched a couple of individuals who had been drawn to the show less by any desire to "speed the plough" or any interest in agricultural affairs generally, than a

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desire to form a collection of purses and other unconsidered trifles which might happen to lurk in the pockets of the unwary.

And one of these leaning on the rails observed to the other: "D'year, cully? pipe that toff as too second prize. D'ye notice anythin'?"

"Dunno what you're drivin' at, Josh."

"That's because you put away too many pints to-day. Why, when that cnap come riding past here and that look come into 'is face when 'is 'orse slipped, I says to myself, if I hadn't seen Tiger Dick put away for a stretch, and read only the other day of 'is being drownded arter breakin' out, I should say that's 'im riding the brown 'orse with the white blaze."

A great shout greeted Jack Branscombe as he rode the winner of the first prize out of the enclosure, and from the equipages parked at the entrance many a fair face smiled radiantly, and many a pair of bright eyes, black, brown, or blue, beamed tenderly upon the handsome yeoman farmer, the beau ideal of a healthful, sporting Englishman, and many a sigh fluttered many a gentle heart, for Handsome Jack seemed impervious to all love's arrows.

But only seemed. Presently, walking his horse past the Dale's dogcart once again, his eyes met those of Doris—those dear eyes beaming in the shade of that dainty straw hat like two stars aglow to guide his soul. Her father was looking at her, stern and cold, near her sat the Squire of Fallowfield, with a strange look in his face that aroused partly her wonder, partly her indignation, and many of the stately county dames were regarding her critically, for she was too bright and breezy, too radiant and dainty not to awaken a certain amount of feminine envy. But Doris forgot all these, forgot for the moment all the world except Handsome Jack.

"Oh! well ridden, indeed!" broke from her.

Gallantly, smartly, he turned his horse's head, reined alongside, detached the red rosette of premier place from his horse's bridle, pressed it in the palm of that dainty, buckskin gauntleted hand, then walked his horse away amid the cries of the delighted crowd.

"Well done, Handsome Jack! He's won another favour now!"

An angry oath escaped the Squire of Fallowfield *sotto voce*, then he sneered:

"Very effective—very theatrical, and just a little bit impertinent."

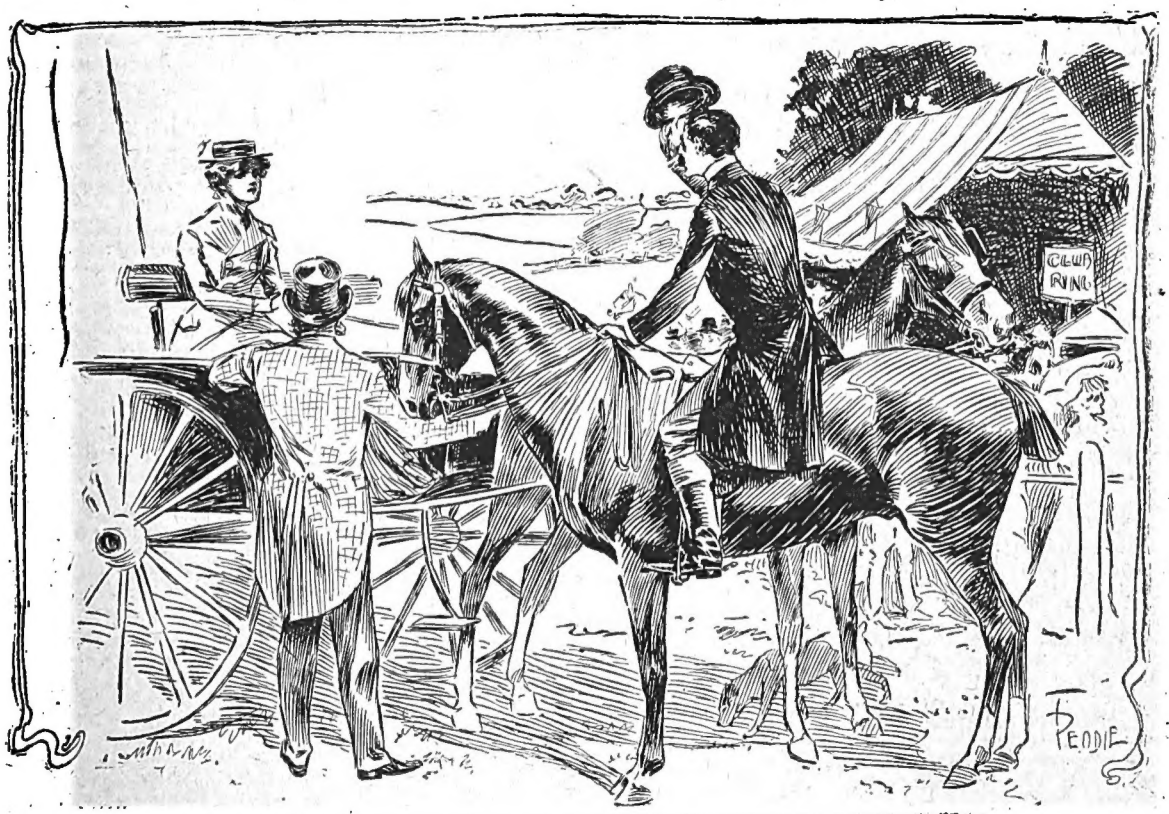
Handsome Jack looked him full and boldly in the face.

"My friend," he said with a mocking smile, "if you've lost the first favour, try not to lose your temper."

He rode on, and, watching him, the new Squire swore in his heart that he would hesitate at nothing, however dark or desperate, to remove from his path the man who had won, not only that rosette, but the heart of Doris Dale.

"Now, Cyril," said Harcourt Dale in his most genial manner, "you'll ride over to the Grange and dine with us, won't you?"

Not much pressure was needed to induce the new neighbour to accept the invitation, for which, indeed, he had been hoping.



"Doris, dear, this is Mr. Cyril Roylance."

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And thus it came to pass that a few hours later he lingered at Harcourt Dale's dinner table praising his choice cigars, his rare old vintages, praising most of all his dainty daughter.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Harcourt Dale, "time hasn't weakened your attachments. Don't you remember when you were a little chap you used to call Doris your little sweetheart?"

"I remember," said the other, with a laugh, quickly.

"Begging your pardon, sir, it wasn't 'little sweetheart,' it was 'little Doris dearie.'"

The guest looked up with a quick frown at the old butler, who from long habit had been wont to avail himself of the privilege of an old retainer.

"Ah, that was it," said the Squire. "Barker's right; wonderful memory Barker."

An uneasy light glittered for a moment in the guest's eyes. He took in the situation in a moment, and with a somewhat forced smile turned to the old retainer.

"Yes, yes, of course I remember. And would you have recognised me, Barker?"

"Can't say as I should, sir," said the old servant with characteristic candour. "I seem to remember you as being inclined to be fair as a boy."

"Ah, that's the Australian sun."

"Maybe, sir, but you seemed inclined more to make flesh. I never looked on you as a little chap as 'ud grow up as lean as a wolfhound."

Later on they joined Doris in the drawing-room, and Harcourt Dale, watching his guest lingering by the piano at his daughter's side, thought how capitally events were shaping.

"Confound it! How late it is getting. Time flies so swiftly when the hours are so pleasant," said the guest.

"Well, then you must spend more of them here. Remember the Grange is always open house to the son of my old friend," said the host.

But the parting hour, however long postponed, arrives at last. Doris had retired some hours before, and her father and his guest had smoked many more cigars and emptied many glasses of the rare old port before the latter mounted his horse and rode away from the Grange.

The night had turned dark, cold, cloudy, and cheerless.

"By Jove!" he muttered, "I've played some desperate games in my time, but this is the riskiest of all. But then, the stakes are the biggest I've ever gone for. Only to think of it, a country mansion, a rent-roll many a nobleman would sigh for, horses, servants, carriages, and all won by a coup! Ah, but there's something else to win—Doris, you're the prize I want, and I'll win you if I have to play ten times the desperate game I've dared already. Hullo there! Who the devil are you, and what are you doing?"

A hand was on his bridle, and his horse was plunging.

"Quick, Josh, fetch him down!" a hoarse voice shouted, and the horseman received a heavy blow upon the shoulder with some weapon from the other side.

But he was no easy man to tackle, as his assailants found. Reining round his horse, he clubbed his whip and struck out savagely. One of the men went down with a groan. Then, turning in the saddle, he gripped the other by the collar. Just then the moon sailed up from behind a bank of cloud, and in its cold, blue light he looked down on a brutal, baleful face. And the man he held looked up into his and gurgled:

"Josh was right! It's Tiger Dick, as sure as I'm alive!"

CHAPTER VI.

The New Squire Meets Old Acquaintances.

"Hush—hush!" exclaimed the horseman in a half-whisper, as though fearful that the very leaves and boughs should hear.

Meantime, the other man, half dazed, had scrambled to his feet, and, attracted by his companion's excited ejaculation, staggered round to his side.

"That's right!" he chuckled hoarsely. "I spotted him at the Show, only I couldn't believe my eyes; but it's 'im, by thunder! And only to think as it was 'im who downed me!"

The Squire of Fallowfield instinctively clapped his hand to the hip pocket where in the old days he invariably carried a pistol. A curse escaped him as he reflected that he had of late neglected the custom that at times had proved so useful.

"It's all a mistake!" he exclaimed hastily, "you fellows have taken me for someone else; let go my horse's head!"

But the man addressed as Barney answered, "No fear, Tiger, it's such a long time since we had the honour of your company, and we thought it was going to be such a long time afore we had ever had it agin' we can't part with you just yet awhile. So it wasn't you as was found in the river?"

"I really don't understand you."

"Chuck it, Tiger! What's the use of shamming soft with us? Who could it 'ave been as was wearing your clothes—the suit with the broad arrow pattern?"

"Hush, Barney!" then the new Squire bit his lip and the man with whom he was expostulating chuckled at the recognition he had let slip.

But the other remarked sententiously: "Don't be rerdicklous, Barney, it ain't to be supposed as 'ow Tiger Dick's going to give the show away by taking us to Fallowfield Hall this time o' night—that's the wust of you, you ain't got no ideas of what's etiquette and proper," this last with a grin.

"I don't mind giving you fellows a few sovereigns to get rid of you, but I don't see the necessity for meeting you."

"Yer don't, don't yer, but we do," grinned Josh. Then, adopting a more truculent tone, he continued: "Now no more hanky, Tiger. I could look over your downin' me, not knowing who I was, but when it comes to givin' old pals the go-bye, don't you think we'll stand that, not us—we know too much."

"But it wouldn't pay you to tell exactly all you know."

"Dunno," said Josh stubbornly, "you know we 'ave 'eard of parties chancing being put away and doing time. Yes, sometimes of going back to Portland for another stretch absolute cheerful, rather than let one as they've worked with wipe his feet on 'em. You ain't one of that sort, Tiger you ain't goin' to play that game, eh? But if you was I'd nark, yes I'd nark on yer if it meant——" To complete the sentence he gave a significant jerk with his left thumb under his left ear.

"What Josh says is right," concurred the other; "yer can't 'ave all yer own way all the time, just as this afternoon you had to be satisfied with only the blue rosette, 'cause there's other folks in the world as well as you, you ain't the only pebble on the beach."

Then, swiftly the new Squire remembered Handsome Jack, felt once again the hate and anger leaping to his heart, reflecting that Jack had won first place and prize in yet another rivalry, and then he reflected that his old acquaintances might be useful and that it might be prudent to appease them, not for old acquaintance sake, but for, to him, more important reasons. And so he answered: "That's all right, boys, I was only playing possum to see how you'd take it. Here's a bit to be going on with, and I'll meet you here at two o'clock to-morrow to talk over business."

"What! Is there any on the board, Tiger?"

"There's good business on the board, Barney, and you are the very men I want to work the oracle."

(To be continued.)

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A COMEDY IN CLIFFORD'S INN.

I.

"Has Miss Madge come in yet, Adams?" asked Mr. Merriman gruffly, as he glared alternately at his watch and the clock.

"No, sir," responded Adams, the smart parlour-maid, for the fourth time in the last half hour.

Mr. Merriman grunted, and his small, keen, grey eyes got red and angry. He turned to Adams.

"Dinner!" he snapped.

Mr. Merriman hated waiting for his dinner after a long and tiring day in the city, but he equally hated sitting down to that meal without the bright face of his only daughter, Madge, at the other end of the table. Madge had kept house for her widower-father for three years, when this unpretending chronicle begins. She had also driven to distraction all the youth of Holland Road and the adjacent parts of Kensington, but that is a mere detail, and has nothing to do with the story.

Alone in the big, sombre dining-room, Mr. Merriman ate his dinner as if he had a grudge against it, and occasionally compared the fat repeater with the clock on the mantelpiece. His little eyes grew redder and angrier, till suddenly the storm burst.

"What's that?" he roared, pointing to the dish before him with a hand that quivered with passion.

"Mutton, sir," murmured the trembling Adams.

"Then why is it sent up to me raw? Yes, raw!" shouted the master of the house. "Take it away! Good Heavens, this is how one's servants rob one. Thirty good pounds a year do I pay to that incompetent savage downstairs, and she gives me raw mutton to eat! It's shameful! It's wicked!"

And, clasping his bald head with his hands, the outraged man arose and pranced savagely in the dining-room.

His paroxysm of grief was cut short by the apparition of his daughter, flushed and breathless with hurry, and in the act of tucking a couple of pink carnations into her waistbelt.

"Why, father!" she cried, in her fresh young voice: "What is the matter? Why, you're so cross that the top of your dear bald head is quite pink. I'm as hungry as I can be! Is dinner ready?"

"The loathsome mess that my cook is pleased to call dinner," replied the sire in a tragic voice, "has been ready for some time. I have been obliged to send the mutton away. I am not a Central African savage, and cannot dine off raw meat. Adams, bring some soup and fish for Miss Madge."

And Mr. Merriman, with a heavy sigh, sank into his favourite seat, and took up a pink-hued evening paper.

"I am sorry to be late," remarked Miss Madge, attacking her soup, "but really Peter Robinson's was so fascinating I could scarcely tear myself away."

"How did you come home?" demanded her father.

"Tube from Oxford Circus to Shepherd's Bush," said the girl promptly. Then she went on with some hesitation: "I had quite an adventure at the station."

It might have been the crimson lamp-shade that made her look as if she were blushing, and—it might not.

"Ho!" shouted Mr. Merriman. "In my young days well-bred girls did not have 'adventures'—at stations or anywhere else."

"Well, it was like this," said Madge, fidgetting with her serviette-ring. "Er—I spent all my money shopping, and when I wanted to take a ticket, I found I hadn't even the harmless, necessary twopence for my fare. So"—she was bending her head over her plate, and speaking very fast—"there was a man—a very nice man, just behind me, and he saw how upset I was—so—he—insisted on lending me the money to get home with."

Mr. Merriman arose, and began to tramp heavily up and down the room. He was crimson in the face, and the veins on his forehead stood out.

"Upon my soul!" he burst out presently, "I believe I'm the most miserable man on this earth. Business is rotten, my servants rob me and give me raw meat to eat, and my only daughter scrapes acquaintance with strange men at railway stations! I wish I was dead—I do, indeed!"

Madge said nothing. She knew her father's peculiar ways, and that a calm would succeed the storm.

"Some fortune hunter, no doubt," said Mr. Merriman, "been dogging you for weeks—months, I shouldn't wonder, Oh, yes! The only daughter of Merriman and Co. is worth knowing." He laughed sarcastically.

"He was a gentleman," cried Madge indignantly.

"I'll thrash the blackguard within an inch of his life," roared her father. "And as for you, my lady, off you go to—your aunt in the country. I'll just give her a hint of the games you've been up to, and she'll discipline you well, I can promise you that!"

This terrible threat having been launched at her head on a average three times a week for the past six years, Madge received it with some calm, and was mentally deciding which of the fascinating blouses at Peter Robinson's she should exact as the price of peace.

"I couldn't help it—you don't expect me to walk all the way from Oxford Circus here?" expostulated the wily young woman.

"You could have taken a cab, I suppose," growled her father. "By careful searching you might have found enough money in the house to pay the fare."

Then he sank back into the chair, lit a cigar, and between the puffs feebly reiterated that he was the most miserable man on earth, and he wished he was dead. Madge poured herself a glass of claret, and drank it with apparent enjoyment. As has been said, she was accus-

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tomed to these scenes, and knew their exact value in the scheme of things.

II.

Mr. Merriman left his office in Idol Lane, E.C., and, climbing heavily into a hansom, told the driver "Clifford's Inn." It was a blazing day, in honour of which the horse wore a straw hat and the driver a cummerbund and a rose in his buttonhole. The attire of Mr. Merriman was likewise suitable to the season. His waistcoat was the whitest, his shepherd's-plaid trousers, the lightest to be beheld that day in the city of London. But the brow of Mr. Merriman was clouded with anger, and he grasped his gold-headed Malacca as a Roman warrior his glaive.

As everybody knows, Clifford's Inn has two entrances, one in Fleet Street, and one through old Sergeant's Inn, in Chancery Lane. It was at the Fleet Street entrance that Mr. Merriman pulled up, and bade his charioteer wait.

He soon found the particular set of chambers of which he was in search, and dealt a resonant blow on the door.

"Come in!" called a cheery voice.

A fair haired young man with bright blue eyes, and a particularly cheery smile was engaged in throwing a miscellaneous collection of things into a Gladstone bag. He looked up.

"Mr. Morse?" inquired the visitor.

"I'm him," said the fair haired young man, regardless of grammar. "Don't mind me going on packing, do you? I've got a train to catch." And he hurled a pair of tennis shoes into the yawning depths of the bag.

"Cool," thought Mr. Merriman. Then aloud he said:

"I will not detain you long, Mr.—ah—Morse. I just wish to know if you are the young man who insulted my daughter at the Oxford Circus tube station last night." With that the angry father grasped his cane in a menacing manner and snorted.

The young man dropped the articles in his hand and stood up quickly.

"I'm not in the habit of insulting people's daughters," said he. "Hadn't you better go?"

"I tell you," cried Mr. Merriman, raising his voice, "that I won't have my daughter insulted by any well-dressed loafer."

"This," said Morse, apparently to the opposite wall, "one can only attribute to the intense heat. Or else drink."

"What!" shrieked the merchant, crimson with fury. "How dare you—you impudent young puppy—insinuate that I—" he choked.

The imperturbed occupant of the chambers resumed his packing, humming as he did so a snatch of "Tell me, pretty maiden."

"Look here," said Mr. Merriman, "you had the impudence to pay my daughter's fare last night. Here it is." He carefully placed two pennies on the table. "If I were a younger man, you should suffer severely," he resumed, glaring at Morse, and trembling with passion.

Morse took up the pennies, looked at them carefully, and dropped them into his trousers pocket.

"Like a receipt?" he asked carelessly.

Mr. Merriman made an inarticulate sound, which aptly expressed mingled anger and contempt, and banged the door behind him. As he descended the stairs he had an uneasy feeling that he had got the worst of it. The scene had not turned out as he had planned it. He, John Merriman, of Idol Lane and Holland Road, Kensington, was not accustomed to be laughed at. He was absorbed in these unpleasant thoughts as he strode angrily into Chancery Lane.

It has been remarked that there are two ways of leaving Clifford's Inn. At the Fleet Street one the cab was waiting. Or, at least, it had been waiting till the driver, learned in the way of bilkers, and remembering the other exit from the inn, loitered casually into Chancery Lane. He soon espied Mr. Merriman, oblivious of all but his late interview with the imperturbable young man of Clifford's Inn.

"Hi, guv'nor!" he cried in a harsh, unpleasant voice.

His late fare looked up with a start.

"By Jove, cabby, I nearly forgot you," remarked the latter.

"Did yer, now?" said the driver waggishly. "Well, what a lucky thing I didn't forgit you, ain't it?"

Mr. Merriman frowned. He was not accustomed to familiarity from cab drivers, and he could not know the dark view which had been taken of his absence of mind. He dived into his pocket. It was empty. He then remembered the donning of the shepherds' plaid trousers that morning, and became uneasy. He searched his other pockets. There remained not a single coin.

"Look here," he said to the cabby, "I haven't any money on me. Just drive me back to my office in Idol Lane, and I'll pay you."

"No, yer don't, Kroojer," cried the cabman in a loud, threatening way. "Fink I didn't see yer tryin' to do a guy out o' the other entrance? Bow Street's your mark."

A small crowd, attracted by the altercation, began to gather. Mr. Merriman looked round in agony. The cabby was signalling with his whip to a distant policeman.

"Wicked ole man!" squeaked a young imp of an errand boy. "Why don't you pay the pore feller?" reproachfully asked a navvy.

The policeman approached, and to him the driver explained that he with the whiskers had left him in Fleet Street, and then deceitfully attempted to depart by Chancery Lane; that he (the cabby) was a respectable man, and had drove a cab for fourteen year, and he wished for nothing but justice.

Things certainly looked very black. Mr. Merriman feebly attempted to explain.

"Yes, I know all about that," interrupted the constable. "You come along."

And he grasped Mr. Merriman by the arm. Tears—actual salt tears—gathered in the merchant's eyes. In its way, the thing was a tragedy.

"There's a mistake here, constable," said a cheery voice, suddenly. "I know this gentleman very well." The owner of the voice carried a Gladstone bag, and was, in fact, Mr. Guy Morse. There was a short consultation, the cabman drove off whistling, and the policeman resumed his walk with a thoughtful air.

"How can I ever thank you?" said Mr. Merriman, with emotion, as he grasped his rescuer's hand. "Come and dine with me when you return from your holiday, and I'll introduce you to my daughter."

And Mr. Morse said he would.

Now Mr. Merriman as he watches the two young people at the piano after dinner, wonders what he will do without Madge.

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A THRILLING INSTALMENT.

THE ADVENTURES OF AN ACTRESS.

XI.—By a Hair's Breadth.

By DONOVAN MART.

CHAPTER I.

"WELL, if this is a sample of Portsmouth weather, all I can say is——. Perhaps on second thoughts I'd better leave it unsaid," ejaculated Raymond Venables, as *The Good Samaritan* Theatrical Company drew up inside the station at Portsmouth.

It was five o'clock on Thursday afternoon. A cold, autumn drizzle was driving remorselessly through the quiet streets of the town. The members of the company were all more or less in a bad temper, enhanced by the prospects of securing apartments amidst such unpalatable climatic surroundings.

Jenny Lovelace bore off Hazel Harlow. The former was an old hand on the road, knew where good lodgings were to be found.

"After last week's terrible adventure, Hazel," she said in a low voice, "I shan't let you out of my sight if I can help it. I promised Eric Monteith I'd look after you until he was well enough to help me, and I shall keep my word."

Hazel smiled rather mournfully. She missed Eric more than she cared to admit, even to herself. The sad accident that had befallen him at Birmingham ordained that it would be some time before he would be able to join the company. Venables had found a substitute, and he was to rejoin *The Good Samaritan* as soon as his medical adviser would permit.

The rooms that Jenny had coveted were luckily vacant. It was not long before the two girls were sitting before the fire and discussing a fragrant cup of tea.

"What a pity the summer's over," Jenny said: "It is jolly here in fine weather. Southsea is great fun. We could have had a bathe and done all sorts of things. Ah, well, we mustn't expect too much," her voice grew suddenly grave, "and we can only hope and trust that we shall get through the week without a repetition of the catastrophe at Bristol."

A slight shudder ran through Hazel's frame. "Sometimes," she said gently, "I feel as though fate means me to give up a theatrical life. I seem to be under a ban. And yet what could I do even if I were to emancipate myself from the stage. The danger that lies over me would be here still. What a terrible man Horace Caldecott is! He drove me from my home, and made my own father turn against me, and even that is not enough for him. His wealth and his powerful resources make him all the more dangerous."

Jenny balled her little fist and shook it fiercely in the imaginative countenance of the man whom she had learnt to hate with all the intensity of her fervent soul. "I wish I could do something to hurt him," she said vindictively, "but, black-hearted villain that he is, he's as slippery as an eel. His day must come some time. In the meanwhile, keep up your pecker, Hazel dear. You've got allies as well as he. We'll best him between us, never fear. And now let's talk of something more cheerful. Let me tell you what Raymond Venables told me a day or so back. He said that when this tour was over he was going to try and get hold of a London theatre; for what object, do you suppose? In order to give the jaded Londoners a chance of going mad over a new star, Miss Hazel Harlow, the famous actress."

A flush of pardonable pride suffused Hazel's face. "Did he really say that?" she cried. "Oh, I should like to come out in London. And did he promise you a part, Jenny?"

"Oh, I saw to that," answered the other, serenely. "Whatever happens to the rest of the crowd, I think I'm all right. And then Venables isn't like some managers I've travelled with. He's got his faults, but he doesn't try to take advantage of one. But then you see he's in love. Oh, yes, he is, Hazel. It's not your fault, but you know perfectly well he'd marry you to-morrow if he could."

"One soon gets used to proposals of marriage on the stage," answered Hazel somewhat bitterly. "It really is amazing how haphazard actors and actresses are as regards matrimony. A man meets a woman, they go on tour together, and he proposes after he's known her three weeks. Then they get married and they——"

"Drift into the Divorce Court, or don't trouble to go so far, but just mutually separate," broke in the other. "Oh, yes, there are precious few happy marriages contracted amongst actors and actresses, I suppose one only hears of the unhappy ones. Well, heaven keep me from becoming the wife of an ordinary actor. Now, if Mr. Eric Monteith were to offer me his hand and heart——"

Jenny stole a roguish glance at her friend, who blushed at the sally, and answered: "Your mind is always running on the same thing, Jenny. I don't want to get married before I've done something in my profession."

Jenny sighed. Yet she determined to say no more on the subject. It was only her great affection for Hazel that made her long for the day when the beautiful young

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actress would be able to snap her fingers in the faces of those who sought to encompass her downfall, safe beneath the protecting eyes of such a husband as Eric Monteith.

Hazel awoke the next morning with a raging headache. On learning this Jenny at once ordered her companion to stay in bed and volunteered to go to a chemist's and purchase some phenacetin. She accordingly sallied forth, with strict injunctions to Hazel on no account to get up until she returned.

Against a lamp-post in the street, a lad was lounging, who looked quickly at Jenny as she issued from the house.

The next moment he had strolled up to her and said in a low voice. "Are you Miss Harlow?"

Jenny gazed at him with suspicion. "And what's that to you?" she asked sharply.

"It's not much to me, but a good deal to you," came the quick answer.

In a moment all the actress's instincts leapt up to quicker action. Some new danger menaced Hazel.

"What do you mean?" she said, after a moment's pause.

"Can I have ten minutes' conversation with you?" went on the lad.

Jenny hesitated. Then she threw open the door of the house from which she had just issued. "Go inside—the first door on the left, and wait till I come back," was the answer, "I shan't be gone more than five minutes."

The strange youth obeyed her without further comment. Beset by a thousand doubts and fears, the girl hurried off on her errand. What was this mystery that had risen up to confront the hapless Hazel almost at the very moment when she had first set foot in Portsmouth?

Jenny lost no time in making her purchase at the chemist's. She flew back with the medicine and up to Hazel's room. "Take this," she said excitedly. "I've told the landlady to bring your breakfast up to you in bed. You're on no consideration to move from here until I tell you. You're in my hands, remember"; and before Hazel had had time to inquire the meaning of this somewhat cavalier command Jenny had disappeared again.

The lad was sitting quietly upon a horsehair sofa in the parlour of the lodging-house when Jenny burst in upon him.

He rose as she entered. "I've been thinking it over," he said quietly. "And you're not Miss Harlow, you're Miss Lovelace."

"Are you hurt," my poor fellow?" said the lady gently.

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Jenny stared at him in well-merited amazement.

"You seem to be wonderfully well informed," she almost gasped. "Who on earth are you, and what is the meaning of your mysterious behaviour?"

"I want to be your friend," came the ready answer, "and though I'm only a boy, I think I can be of service to you. Danger threatens you and Miss Harlow, and unless you are put upon your guard, there's no knowing what may happen."

The lad spoke with impressive seriousness, remarkable in one who could have been little more than sixteen. The actress felt a sudden thrill of apprehension run through her.

"For goodness' sake speak out," she cried. "Don't keep me any longer in suspense. Who are you?"

"My father is a publican," came the ready answer, "and keeps the Three Jolly Sailor Boys in Wilson Street, down by the dockyard. Last evening three men came into the inn, and asked for a private sitting-room. The room my father showed them into was one with a bay window, across which heavy curtains were drawn. In the recess thus formed between the window and the curtain I had gone to sleep, not thinking that anyone would use the room that night. I was awakened by hearing voices.

"My first impulse was to spring up and declare myself. A sentence I heard, however, made me remain where I was. As a consequence I kept still and heard the unfolding of a black scheme that has the ruin of Miss Harlow as its end.

"Suddenly, after they had finished talking, one of the men rose. 'There's a window here,' he said, 'let's see what sort of a night it is.'

"In a moment I realised I should be discovered. There was nothing for it but to feign sleep. I shut my eyes and lay still. The next moment the curtains were pulled aside, and I knew that a man was looking down upon me. He uttered a horrible oath. 'What's this?' he cried. 'We've been betrayed.'

"The other two men hurried to his side. As though I had just been awakened, I sprang up and rubbed my eyes. 'What is the matter?' I cried.

"'What are you doing here?' said the man who had first found me, roughly.

"As well as I could I explained that I had come in here and fallen asleep. I protested that I had heard nothing, and at last they believed me. 'It's wonderful how a kid will sleep,' they said.

"So I was allowed to depart, and I determined I would come here first thing and tell you all I had heard."

"Yes, tell me quickly," cried Jenny breathlessly.

Thus adjured, the lad told his story. Needless to say, the actress drank in every word with avidity.

CHAPTER II.

It so happened that on the morning after their arrival at Portsmouth two letters arrived for Hazel and Jenny. That to the former was from Venables, asking her to come round to the Theatre Royal about midday, as he wanted to see her as regards some details of the evening's performance, the one for Jenny was from a lady in Southsea, requesting her to go thither for a friendly call, the writer stating that a mutual friend of the two women had inspired the invitation.

The way to the theatre from the lodgings lay through a rather poor quarter of the town. At about half past eleven the door of the house that was to be the two actresses' domicile during their sojourn in Portsmouth opened, and a woman, heavily veiled, issued forth.

She was well-dressed, and a wealth of red-gold hair was massed coquettishly beneath the big picture-hat that crowned her head. The dress was one that Hazel had had made only a few weeks before.

She walked quickly forward, looking neither to the right, nor to the left, with the air of one who knew her way well. This was all the more remarkable, inasmuch as Hazel was a stranger to Portsmouth.

At last she turned down a narrow street, evidently *en route* for the theatre, which was now only a few minutes' distant.

Suddenly her attention was arrested by two poorly-clad men on the pavement in front of her. The one was a burly, thick-set man, the other a much poorer specimen of humanity. They were evidently quarrelling. Just as the girl drew alongside them the bigger man turned ferociously upon his companion and dealt him a cruel kick upon the shin. The man dropped with a groan, whereupon his cowardly assailant made off at the top of his speed.

The woman stopped almost instinctively. The man lay moaning on the ground. He gazed piteously up at the veiled lady before him. The bystanders, evidently accustomed to such scenes, showed but languid interest.

"Are you hurt, my poor fellow?" said the lady gently.

"I think my leg's broken, miss," the man moaned.

"Let me help you up!" The girl bent down, and, by the aid of her slim, firm hand, the injured one, wincing with pain, dragged himself to his feet.

"Where do you live?" asked his fair helper.

"Up a court not far from here, miss," he groaned.

"Can I help you there?"

"Heaven bless you if you would."

The girl was evidently a real Samaritan. The man leant heavily on her arm, yet she walked firmly forward, regardless of the curious glances and comments that came from the rough people amongst whom she now found herself. The man's pain seemed to increase at every forward step. It was evident from his gestures that he had received no slight injury.

"I'm glad it ain't far," he muttered hoarsely. The girl made no answer. Gradually they moved onward, until at length the fellow indicated that she was to turn down a narrow court.

"The fourth door on the left, miss," he said, "and then up a flight of stone steps to a door on the first landing. My word, how it do hurt," and he leant harder than ever upon the arm of his fair upholder, who found his weight becoming almost more than she could support.

But he was in such evident agony, she must have felt it would have been heartless in the extreme to leave him to crawl home as best he might.

Painfully, and with extreme difficulty, he was got up the flight of stairs.

"Open the door, please, miss," he said, in a strained voice.

The girl threw open the door, the man hanging on to her more tenaciously than ever. It was a gloomy, dingy apartment. Inside it was a man, well dressed, well groomed, strangely out of keeping with his surroundings.

Then a strange thing happened. The injured man, a moment before scarcely able to drag one foot after another, sprang up as though the sight of the stranger had endowed him with health and strength once more. The next instant, before the amazed girl could properly

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realise what had happened, he had darted away and out of the chamber, slamming the door behind him in his exit.

The stranger and the girl were alone. With a faint cry she sank in a huddled-up heap on the floor.

For a few seconds silence reigned, then the man found his voice.

"It's a long game of hide and seek we've been playing, Hazel," he said, almost mockingly, "and it's sad to think how much labour I've had to employ to gain what should have been mine without an effort. You've been in my grasp before now, only to have escaped because luck was against me, and all your so-called friends were around you. But now I think you must admit that the game is mine. Your protector, Eric Monteith, is *hors de combat*, Miss Jenny Lovelace has been called off to Southsea on a fool's errand, and you are alone here and in my power. Shall we come to terms, or must I make my own. That's the worst of having a soft heart. It may prove your undoing in the end. Don't stay in that huddled-up position. After all, you're in the presence of your husband"—he made a step forward and put out his hand in order to raise the girl to her feet.

This action seemed to suddenly galvanise her into renewed life. She sprang to her feet, and threw back her veil. Her hand went to her bosom.

"Not so fast, Mr. Horace Caldecott," she said in a firm voice. "It's loaded! Look out for yourself!"

"It" was a particularly ugly-looking little revolver with a gleaming barrel. Caldecott recoiled, as well he might.

But it was not the sight of the pistol directed point-blank at his head that was altogether responsible for the terrible look of baffled rage and fear that transformed his features.

For it was not Hazel Harlow at whom he gazed. Hair and dress were as hers were. *The face was that of Jenny Lovelace*—Jenny, who had taken this desperate step to save the woman she loved so whole-heartedly.

In a moment the reason for the thick black veil became apparent, while the wig that covered Jenny's raven tresses only set off the pale, resolute face with startling distinctness. Small wonder that a sudden fear filled Horace Caldecott's black heart

"To such sordid depths have you sunk," went on Jenny in a biting voice, still levelling the weapon at his head, "that you can conceive so base a trick to entrap a woman as pure and as unsullied as Hazel Harlow, a woman whose only misfortune it is ever to have met a scoundrel like you. What has she done that you should persecute her so, that you should thrust your loathsome attentions upon her? But the game's not so one-sided as you imagined, is it? You do well to match your strength with women's. Sometimes it happens that the battle is not always to the strong. And I don't think you bargained for your present position."

Caldecott writhed in impotent fury. It was only a slip of a girl who stood before him, yet with that insidious little weapon in her hand she was more than his match and he knew it. Vainly he cast about him for some means of escape.

He moistened his dry lips with his tongue. With an effort he found his voice. It was with the worst possible grace he said:

"I suppose, according to your ethics, I am the biggest villain imaginable, yet you seem to forget the old adage that 'all's fair in love or war.' My action is from the point of view of the lover, yours, also a piece of trickery, the reverse of the shield. I couldn't win Hazel by fair means"—he shrugged his shoulders—"there was no other course open to me."

Jenny's lip curled in scorn.

"And that is your explanation," she said, "of as cowardly and merciless a persecution as ever was conceived by man. When you knew that Hazel had, and never could have, any love for you, you still persisted in your horrible attentions, ay, and tried to drag down not only her, but those who had championed her. I myself have suffered at your cowardly hands before to-day."

"You don't understand," answered the other sullenly, "I love Hazel with all my heart and soul. She was promised to me long ago. I have sacrificed too much now to give her up. I have sworn I will let nothing stand in my path, and but for the most cursed luck that ever dogged a man, she would have been mine long ago."

"Love from your lips is a profanation of the word," answered the girl sturdily. "I did not come here and risk so much without due preparation. Were I to act as my heart tells me, I should pull the trigger of this pistol and make you answer here, at this very moment, for your sins; but I will not become a wilful murderess, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"You give me some substantial gage that from this moment Hazel Harlow is free of your attentions for ever."

"And if I refuse."

"I will sacrifice myself that Hazel may live in peace from any further fear of what you can do. I will forestall the gallows of their rightful victim."

Jenny spoke with amazing vigour and directness. Notwithstanding his position, her attitude compelled Caldecott's admiration. With all his faults he was no coward. He could at least appreciate a woman's strength of mind, even though he was the unwilling victim. The girl read his reluctant admiration in his eyes.

"Come, decide," she said sharply; "which will you choose, life and a substantial proof that Hazel has nothing more to fear from you, or death. I am desperately in earnest."

"Will you tell me first how you came to discover the plot to bring Hazel here?"

"I will tell you nothing. It is no use your trying to temporise. The matter must be settled now and for always."

Caldecott saw that the sands of her patience were running low.

"What proof must I give you?" he asked in a low voice, eyeing the weapon that was still levelled at his head.

"The only proof worth anything when dealing with a gentleman of your morals," was the cool retort; "one that will not only be binding, but will lay you by the heels should you try to escape from it—a signed attestation in the presence of a magistrate."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I must sacrifice myself for the best woman in the world and put a bullet through you." Caldecott laughed, but there was little mirth in his laugh.

"Spoken like one of the heroines whose character you must often assume upon the boards," he said sneeringly.

Jenny stamped her little foot upon the floor.

Begin "Dead to the World" to-day.

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"I can waste no more time and patience," she said. "Your answer! Yes, or no!"

Caldecott shrugged his shoulders with would-be nonchalance. "I suppose I must submit to your ladyship," he said, with a glare of hatred. "May I ask if you are going to accompany me into the street holding that revolver at my head in so correct an attitude. Surely such a course of procedure would attract attention."

"There is a police-station round the corner," answered Jenny. "My idea is that you should walk on first. I will follow behind you, and remember, if you attempt to run away I shall fire. I'm desperate, remember," and the girl's appearance did not belie her remark.

"First of all let me give you a word of advice," said Caldecott sharply. "Put down your pistol and return the way you came. You are a woman, and can be pardoned for your hysterical action. But I warn you you little know into what danger you will be running if you proceed with this mad folly of yours."

"You villain!" burst out Jenny, with blazing eyes. "How can you stand there and chide me as if I were in the wrong when you it is who have planned and plotted such diabolical schemes. Do as I bid you, tell your story at the police-station, and let us see if there be any justice there."

"There will be commonsense there," muttered Caldecott, "the woman's mad." Suddenly his expression changed. "I am at your service," he said, with a bow, and preceded her from the room and down the dingy stairs into the reeking street.

Jenny's eyes followed him, and her little hands clutched the revolver convulsively beneath the folds of her cloak.

Without hesitation he led the way to the police-station. "He is only a coward after all," ran Jenny's thoughts. "At last I see a way to save Hazel."

Poor girl! She little knew how bitter was to be her disappointment, or the deep cunning that lay in Horace Caldecott's heart.

Caldecott entered the police-station with the air of a man who knew the place intimately, and entered the superintendent's room, quickly followed by Jenny.

But quick as she was, she could not forestall a move on the part of the man she thought was really in her power at last. He slipped a sovereign into the hand of the blue-coated official in the room, murmuring as he did so: "A madwoman with a pistol! She meant to kill me!"

Low as the words had been Jenny heard them. She sprang forward, and her very action proved her undoing. Her wild gestures and impassioned voice prejudiced the matter-of-fact officer against her, to say nothing of the fact that he was the richer by a golden sovereign.

"It's a lie!" cried the girl. "He's a villain, and he has come here to sign an agreement that is to protect an innocent woman from his wickedness."

"You see," said Caldecott significantly, "her actions betray her!"

Maddened by the villain's callousness, Jenny, overwrought by the events of the last few hours, drew the revolver from her pocket and pointed it at Caldecott's head. Instinctively he ducked down. The police superintendent rushed forward and knocked up the girl's hand. There was a loud report and the bullet buried itself in the wall above Caldecott's head. The next moment the policeman had snatched the weapon out of her hand.

Then reaction came. Jenny burst into tears, and sinking down upon the floor gave herself up to a paroxysm of weeping.

"You see," cried Caldecott, assured now that the victory was won. "The woman's dangerously mad. She's a stranger to me. See to her, or we shall all be killed!"

His words fell with poignant acuteness on Jenny's ears. She realised in a moment that all her efforts had been in vain. She, a weak, ignorant woman—ignorant, that is to say, compared with this villain, and his knowledge of the world—had pitted her puny strength against a far subtler intellect than her own.

Instead of victory had come terrible defeat. Caldecott had played with her all the time as a cat with a mouse.

In the meanwhile the police-superintendent had knelt down, and with one quick motion had fastened a pair of handcuffs round Jenny's slender wrists.

"Good!" cried Caldecott with devilish glee. "I'll run for help!"

He dashed for the door and out into the corridor. A couple of policemen were standing sheepishly outside, undecided as to what course of action they should pursue. They had heard the pistol-shot, and were in readiness to give their aid should it be required.

"Quick!" cried Caldecott, "go inside! You're wanted."

Then, assured that his words would have the desired effect of calling off attention from himself, he dashed outside and away.

"I'm well out of that," he muttered. "What a fool Miss Jenny is! She's got herself into a fine mess now, and no mistake. A woman's all right in her proper place, but the moment she tries to be original she's bound to come a fall."

With which cynical reflection he disappeared from the neighbourhood of the police-station.

CHAPTER III.

Jenny's behaviour had absolutely mystified Hazel that morning.

She had rushed out to the chemist, and, returning, had disappeared again with strict injunctions to her friend to remain quiet until her own return.

Hazel, suffering from neuralgia as she was, had been only too glad to obey her friend's mandate. And yet Jenny's behaviour had been so mysterious that she felt convinced something unusual had happened.

Towards midday Hazel rose and dressed. Then she found that her new hat and dress had mysteriously disappeared. Where? The mystery was deepening.

At last she could bear the state of uncertainty no longer. Jenny showed no signs of appearing. Hazel's head ache had departed. She determined to go round to the theatre and find out if Jenny had been heard of there.

She issued from the house and determined to ask the nearest way to the theatre. A man with head bent and every appearance of haste was hurrying down the street. She would stop him and inquire if he could direct her.

He drew level with her and raised his head. Her blood seemed to freeze in her veins. There was no mistaking who the man was. *It was Horace Caldecott!* She uttered a faint scream of fear.

He paused for an instant. Then her courage came back to her. She drew herself up and looked boldly at his hated face. His eyes dropped before her

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steady gaze. His lips moved convulsively. He tried to speak but no words came. The next moment he had disappeared from sight.

So he was in Portsmouth. What could be the meaning of his hated presence there? Was she never to be free from his loathsome attentions? How she longed for Eric's protection. Never had she felt more helpless than at that moment, when alone and unprotected in a strange city she realised that her hated lover was near her, and probably scheming how he could ensnare her anew.

Was she never to be free of his loathsome addresses. What had she done that she should be persecuted thus? Was this man to be allowed for ever to ride rough-shod over the paths of her life? Was there no way in which she could ensure immunity from his attacks upon her honour?

Then her thoughts turned in natural sequence to Jenny. Could her faithful friend and companion have discovered that Caldecott was in Portsmouth? Had her strange behaviour of the morning any bearing on the fact of her detestable lover's presence? A thousand doubts and fears beset Hazel's heart. Come what would she felt that she must try and discover Jenny's whereabouts. And at the theatre she would be most likely to find an elucidation of the mystery.

A friendly policeman directed her as to the shortest way to reach her goal. In a few minutes she was speeding away through the squalid streets along which Jenny, not so very long before, had proceeded to try and achieve her mad and profitless scheme of bringing Caldecott to book.

Raymond Venables, Hayward Lindsay, and Pendennis, together with Cora Bond, one of the ladies of the company, were at the theatre. None of them had seen Jenny. Venables noticed that something was amiss with Hazel.

"Can I help you in any way?" he asked in a low solicitous voice, drawing her apart from the others.

Hazel hesitated. Yet the manager was her friend. She knew that. He would also have given a good deal to be nearer and dearer. That she knew also. Yet he would not try and take advantage of his position now, whatever he might have done when first she had joined the company.

Hazel was fully aware of that. And now that Eric was not there to give her his help and counsel, she valued his presence all the more. She had long ago confided in him how affairs stood between her and Caldecott. So she did not hesitate.

"I have just seen—Mr. Caldecott!" she said with an effort. "It's unnerved me, and somehow I can't help feeling uneasy about Jenny. I don't know what has become of her."

An exclamation of anger fell from Venables' lips.

"Do you mean to say that cur dares to show his face in Portsmouth after all that has happened?" he muttered hoarsely. "Where is he? He ought to be arrested and locked up."

"I don't know where he is now," answered Hazel, who was on the verge of tears. "I saw him for a moment in the street."

Venables ground his teeth together in impotent rage. "I'd like to put a bullet through him!" he muttered vindictively.

But at that moment a message was brought to Venables asking him to go round to the front of the theatre. He hastily complied with the request, to find a policeman awaiting him.

The constable touched his hat respectfully.

"Have you a lady in your company of the name of Lovelace, sir?" he asked.

Caldecott recoiled, as well he might.

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"Yes," answered Venables sharply. "What then?"

"Will you come round to the police-station with me?"

Venables stared at the man in surprise.

"Is Miss Lovelace there?" he cried.

"A young person charged with attempted murder, and giving that name, is, sir."

"Good Heavens!" cried the manager. "One moment, officer."

He rushed off and begged Hazel to come with him. Together they accompanied the policeman to the station.

Here they found the luckless Jenny handcuffed in an inner room.

The indignation of her two colleagues knew no bounds. In broken, almost disconnected words Jenny told her story. How that the publican's son had come to her and revealed the plot that Caldecott had made to entrap Hazel, how she had impersonated her friend, and had hoodwinked Caldecott only to be defeated when victory seemed within her grasp.

But the police-superintendent was not to be thus easily persuaded that he had made a mistake.

"The young lady tried to murder the unknown gentleman," he said obstinately, perhaps mindful of the piece of gold that reposed securely in his pocket, Caldecott's gift. "this story of the publican's lad and what he heard sounds a bit long drawn. Why not find the boy and bring him here. Then, if his story substantiates what this lady says, well, we can see then what's best to be done. I can't afford to run any risks."

"But where's the man who came in here and laid the charge against Miss Lovelace?" cried Venables hotly. "Why don't you produce him?"

The manager's question nettled the professional pride of the superintendent. He was perfectly well aware that Caldecott's defalcation was a more damning piece of evidence against him than anything. This fact made him all the more intolerant as regards Jenny.

"Be that as it may, sir!" he said firmly, "the fact remains that Miss Lovelace rushed in here and fired a pistol at the gentleman's head. There is the case in a nutshell, and she'll have to remain here until the business has been sifted."

"Very well," answered Venables, keeping his temper with an effort, "perhaps you will allow Miss Harlow to remain with her friend till I return with the lad who told Miss Lovelace about the villainous plot he had overheard planned at the Three Jolly Sailor Boys. Then we'll make a sworn deposition before a magistrate and see if we can't lay the villain who is responsible for all this by the heels."

The superintendent could but comply with this request. He knew in his heart of hearts that his prisoner was more sinned against than sinning, and yet—a golden sovereign, as Caldecott had known only too well, is often a powerful factor in determining the upshot of a doubtful point of law.

Accordingly Venables hurried off, bidding the two keep their hearts up. But at the Three Jolly Sailor Boys all was confusion and bustle. The publican's son had not been seen since early that morning. No trace of him was to be found.

"What do you want with my boy?" asked the innkeeper suspiciously. "What's your business with him? Perhaps you know where he is?"

"If I did should I come and ask for him?" cried the perplexed and baffled manager. "The fact of the matter is I particularly wanted him to aid in clearing up a particularly annoying business."

In as few words as possible he told the man what had happened, with the result, as can be readily understood, of only adding to the innkeeper's anxiety.

This new complication had only added to the difficulties of the situation. In the first place, Venables would have to return to the police-station and admit that the lad could not be found; secondly it would mean that Jenny would be kept in confinement until something was forthcoming to clear her from the charge of being a wanton and reckless breaker of the public peace.

Crestfallen and gloomy he returned to the station. "The boy can't be found," he said moodily.

"I thought as much," answered the superintendent, with ill-concealed satisfaction at the way in which his conduct was being justified. "It strikes me as there isn't any boy in the case at all."

Venables' anger blazed forth uncontrollably now. "Confound you!" he cried, "what do you mean to insinuate? I'll get you into trouble for that remark as sure as my name's what it is."

"You will, will you?" was the equally heated rejoinder. "Very well, then, this *lady* can spend the night in the cells. I know my duty without being taught it by a lot of actors and actresses."

It was all Venables could do to restrain himself from flying at the man's throat. Suddenly Hazel spoke.

"Look here, superintendent," she said gently, "you can't surely be in earnest. This lady is innocent of any intent to commit a crime. She only did what she has done in loyalty to myself. I could bring a hundred witnesses to prove that the man you say she tried to murder is a black-hearted villain. You will surely release her on my recognisances to-night? To-morrow we can appear here to vindicate our honour."

The man was somewhat mollified by the girl's sweet voice, and by a beauty that few men could resist. But he was not to be won over entirely from his subservience to outraged officialdom by any amount of blandishments.

"I'm sorry, miss," he said firmly, "but the lady must stay here to-night. She'll be brought up before the magistrates to-morrow morning, and the whole affair will be sifted thoroughly."

Hazel uttered a low cry. It was terrible to think that Jenny would have to spend a night in the police-court, as though she had been a common gaol-bird.

At that instant an event happened so absolutely unexpected to all the actors concerned that each was deprived of all power of further speech or action.

The door of the room opened and three men entered. The police superintendent drew himself up with military precision to the salute. Two of the men were well dressed, elderly gentlemen, the other was—Horace Caldecott!

Hazel uttered a low cry and shrank back against the wall, Venables clenched his fist mechanically, and swore under his breath, Jenny could only gaze with horror in her eyes at the audacious scoundrel who had, with such bare-faced audacity, dared to come back and confront the victims of his villainy.

"Well, Curtis," began one of the two strange gentlemen, "what's the bother? Colonel Derbyshire and myself have come here at the instigation of my friend, Mr. Caldecott here, to see if we can offer any magisterial jurisdiction over this affair. We've got a full enough

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charge-sheet to-morrow without adding any more to the list."

"Quite so, Sir George," stammered the superintendent; "the fact is——"

"That lady made a little mistake," broke in Caldecott, with a smile. "She's to be let off this time, eh, George?"

"You blackguard!" burst out the fiery Venables, addressing the suave villain with unmistakable directness. "How dare you have the effrontery to come here as if you were the injured party. I'll run the risk of being locked up myself for the pleasure of giving you a thrashing!" And mad with rage, he sprang forward and would have proceeded to try and put his words into effect, with what result it is impossible to say, had not the superintendent sprang forward and dragged him back.

"The fellow thinks he's still on the stage," sneered Caldecott to the magistrate. "That's the worst of these actors. They can't get away from their shop. He evidently imagines that I am responsible for this lady's"—indicating Jenny—"experiments on me with a six-shooter. That's what I call gratitude, when I came round here on purpose to try and get her off."

The magistrate addressed as Sir George looked contemptuously at Venables.

"I'd have you know, sir," he said, "that this gentleman is a personal friend of mine, and that I consider that your remarks are as unjustifiable as they are impertinent."

"And I would have *you* know," retorted Venables, boiling with pardonable fury, "that I consider you are by no means to be congratulated upon the choice of your friends. The misery that man has inflicted upon those who have been unfortunate enough to come under his influence is unutterable. He has done things, one of which would have been enough to have ensured a rope round his neck anywhere else."

The magistrate went purple in the face at this flouting of his pompous person.

But Caldecott, who, with masterly cunning, absolutely ignored Hazel's presence, knew well enough how to play his cards.

"My dear George," he said, "if I don't care what the fellow says why should you trouble. You've known me a good many more years than you have this gentleman minutes. Just authorise that this lady be liberated, and we need waste no more time. As I have explained to you, she must have been labouring under a misapprehension."

"That is a base lie!" suddenly cried Jenny. "Oh, gentlemen," she said, appealing almost tearfully to the two magistrates, "why will you take all this man says for gospel. Ask Miss Hazel Harlow what she knows about him; ask me; ask many another whose name I could give you! I own I shot at him wilfully—I would have killed him. Why not bring us up in court together and let him face the music as I am prepared to do?"

Jenny spoke simply and well. Colonel Derbyshire and Sir George Chetwynd exchanged glances. What could it all mean? Surely that was an extraordinary statement to come from a young girl's lips. Yet Chetwynd and Caldecott had been at Cambridge together. The latter was rich, influential. Nay, more, he had positively asserted that Jenny must have fired at him under a delusion. The garbled version of how she had entrapped him, when coming from lips so well versed in lying as his own, had not fallen on barren ground. Both Sir George and his brother magistrate were prepared to back him up in everything.

Jenny's outspoken words had stung Caldecott to the quick. He shot a stealthy glance at Chetwynd. How would the magistrate act?

The local Rhadamanthus stared at the girl in amazement. He had not expected such a retort. But then, he reflected, the girl was an actress. Coming from a woman in her class of life—Sir George classed all actresses together as women on a different plane to the rest of their sex—the words lost half their force in his ears.

"Don't you think, madam," he said somewhat coldly, "that you are acting somewhat uncharitably towards Mr. Caldecott, who has so chivalrously come forward to save you from an exceedingly awkward predicament? It is permissible, no doubt, upon the stage to level fire-arms at people's heads, but when it comes to real life such an act is apt to lead to unpleasantnesses. I think you would be better advised to put a bridle upon your tongue, and admit the generosity that wishes to save you in spite of yourself."

The position of the three allies was maddening in the extreme. Yet they were powerless to bring home to the plausible villain before them the proof of his duplicity.

He had indeed played a masterly game throughout. Suave, smiling, self-confident, he looked the embodiment of a debonnair man of the world.

But the comedy was not yet played out. A sudden commotion outside the room caused all to turn round. The next moment the door was flung open, and the lad who had been Jenny's informant of Caldecott's plot, stormed inside the apartment, followed by his father.

"There he is!" cried the lad, pointing at Caldecott. "I should know him anywhere. The others have given me the slip, but I should know him anywhere. Don't you recognise him, father?"

"Ay, ay," cried the innkeeper; "that's he right enough. Collar hold of him, someone. I'll teach him to make my inn a place for hatching vile plots against women!"

The tables were turned with a vengeance. A livid flush overspread Caldecott's face. An oath escaped his lips. Sir George Chetwynd turned to him in bewilderment.

"What on earth does this mean?" he cried.

But this was a situation that Caldecott had not bargained for. In a moment he realised that the game was up. Both the innkeeper and his son knew too much. Their evidence, coming on the top of Jenny's accusation, would convince even Sir George, prejudiced as he was in his friend's favour, that there had been villainy afoot.

All this passed through the cornered villain's brain at lightning speed. He determined on flight, and that before the occupants of the room had had time to recover from their surprise.

Before anyone could lay hands upon him he had dashed to the door, overthrowing the landlord with the impetuosity of his movement. The next moment he was out of the room, and out of the building before anyone had had time to raise a finger to stop him.

And when his late friends and adversaries had recovered their senses, it was only to find that he had slipped through their fingers. Venables and the inn

Begin "Dead to the World" to-day.

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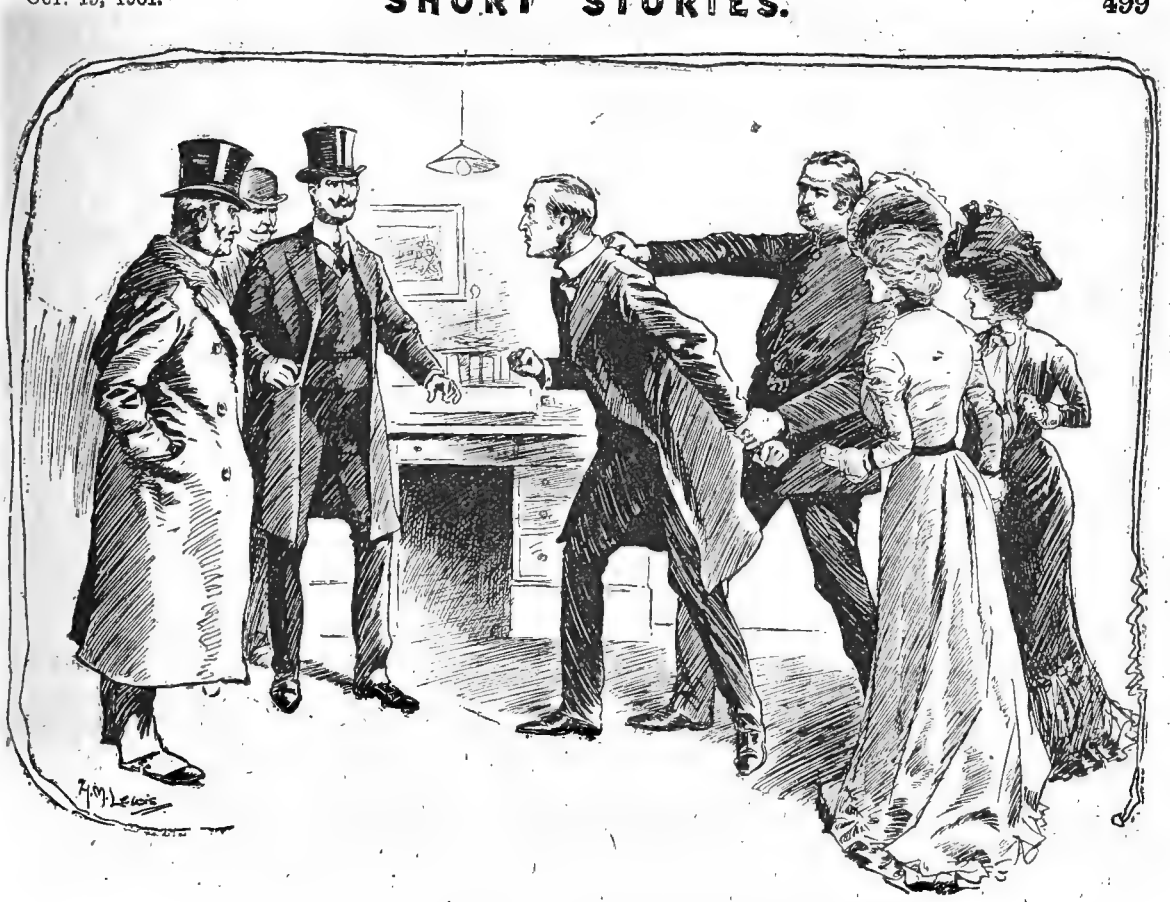

"You blackguard!" burst out the fiery Venables.

keeper's son dashed off in pursuit. But a glance down the crowded street outside speedily convinced them that their chance of apprehending the slippery scoundrel was remote indeed.

Ruefully they returned to the party inside the building.

"Have I taken leave of my senses?" cried Sir George. "Here, my boy, let's have your version of this affair."

Thus adjured the boy stepped forward and related what he had already told to Jenny early that morning.

"The plot I heard the three men scheming," he said in the course of his narrative, "was as follows: They were to despatch two notes to Miss Harlow and Miss Lovelace, the one to Miss Harlow asking her to step round to the theatre to see Mr. Venables; that to Miss Lovelace from a lady in Southsea, asking her to go there.

"They were then to get Miss Harlow to take pity on a wounded man, and to help him to a house where Mr. Caldecott was to be waiting.

"I told Miss Lovelace this, and she asked me to tell no one what I had said to her. She was going to impersonate Miss Harlow. I saw the accident in the street, just as the man had planned it. I followed one of them, meaning to run him to earth if possible, but I lost sight of him. Then I went back to the scene of the plot, and got on the track of the man who had pretended to be injured. But he recognised me, and I became the hunted one. After a lot of narrow escapes I gave him the slip. I then hurried back home, as I knew they would be anxious about me there. My father told me that Mr. Venables had come to see if he could find me, and we hurried off here. I then heard Mr. Caldecott's voice, and thought we had at last run him to earth. But it appears the whole three were too slippery altogether."

The lad's narrative, sketchy though it was, convinced Sir George Chetwynd and Colonel Derbyshire that they had been supporting the cause of a man who had no right to their good offices. It was impossible, in the face of such overwhelming evidence, to believe that Jenny Lovelace had been actuated by other than exalted motives in her endeavour to bring Caldecott to book.

They accordingly begged her to give them her story. She told them all; how she had cornered the scoundrel and had elicited from him a promise to accompany her to the police-court and make a declaration in the presence of witnesses that he would abstain from further molestation of Hazel Harlow. His own diabolical cunning was answerable for the mad access of rage that caused her to fire the revolver at him.

Turn to page 482 at once.

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The girl told her story well.

"And that man," she said in conclusion, "who has so nearly succeeded in hoodwinking you gentlemen as to his real nature, has escaped again to carry on his schemes against a woman whose only fault is that she will not listen to his detestable suit. I mean Miss Hazel Harlow here. Time after time he has endeavoured to ensnare her into his hateful net. Can you wonder that I made an effort to save her, that I was prepared to go to any lengths to rid her of the persecution of such a monster. Here is a case in point how difficult it is to bring his villainies home to him. He is rich, has an unassailable position in society, possesses amongst his friends gentlemen with the unimpeachable integrity of Sir George Chetwynd and Colonel Derbyshire."

But here the former gentleman interrupted her.

"For my part," he said fervently, "Horace Caldecott is off my visiting-list from this moment. Nay, more, if ever he crosses my path again I'll not spare him." Then he turned to Hazel. "Miss Harlow," he said, "I should like, during your stay in Portsmouth, to ensure you immunity from any chance of further molestation. Will you and Miss Lovelace give my wife and myself the great pleasure of becoming our guests while you are here? I can have you driven to and from the theatre every night in my brougham. Believe me, it would be a great pleasure to me if you would allow me to do this."

There was tears of heartfelt gratitude in Hazel's eyes as she answered—

"Indeed, sir, I should be churlish in the extreme were I to refuse your kind offer. In Miss Lovelace's name and my own, I accept your offer with heartfelt gratitude."

"And I beg to apologise for my remarks just now," cried Venables. "And if you will accept a box at the theatre for to-night and every night this week, if your friends would care to see our performance, I shall be greatly honoured."

Sir George accepted the manager's offer in the same cordial spirit with which it was tendered.

Then he turned to the innkeeper's son.

"I think we ought to send round the hat for this lad," he said, turning to the company. "For, after all, he is responsible for this happy ending to what might have been a most black and tragic business."

His proposition met with a ready response. And the lad, at all events, had no reason to regret the businesss that had brought him into such prominence, and nearly into such an *impasse*.

Among the most interested spectators of *The Good Samaritan* that night were Sir George Chetwynd and his party. Hazel and Jenny were both the recipients of lovely bouquets. And the rest of that week went by for them as happily and as expeditiously as is the lot of few actresses on tour. As the honoured guests of Sir George and Lady Chetwynd their stay in Portsmouth was one that lingered long in their memories.

Next week *The Good Samaritan* Company were due at Leeds. In this thriving manufacturing town Hazel was to meet with an adventure that was to prove to her that there are dangers in the life of an actress that can never be accounted for beforehand. Readers of this series will find the next story in no wise lacking in interest from any of the others that have preceded it. Your friends would surely be delighted if you would mention Hazel Harlow to them.

1D. 2

ANOTHER NEW

PEARSON

MORNING PAPER.

1D. 2

THE

Midland Express

WILL APPEAR

Tuesday, October 22nd.

On the above date a new halfpenny morning paper, the *Midland Express*, will make its first appearance in the whole of the Midland and Pottery Districts.

Local news will be given very fully. Events happening all over the world will be dealt with in a style never before attempted by any provincial newspaper.

The *Midland Express* will be worked in conjunction with Mr. C. Arthur Pearson's marvelously successful London paper, the *Daily Express*.

Private wires have been laid between London and the offices of the *Midland Express*. Every night the news gathered all over the world will be sent direct to the *Midland Express*, which will thus really have its own correspondents in every city of importance in the world.

The *Midland Express* will contain special contributions by all the greatest living writers of the day.

In matters of Sport the *Midland Express* will have no rival. Racing will be fully dealt with by an expert staff.

Mr. C. B. Fry, the International full back, and Mr. J. J. Bentley, the President of the Football League, and late Football Editor of the *Athletic News*, together with a large staff of expert reporters, will be responsible for the football news, notes, and comments.

Fashion and other matters of interest to women will be specially treated by the best artists and writers.

Serial stories will be a regular feature, and one page of the *Midland Express* will be profusely illustrated every day.

The combination of the London *Express* with the *Midland Express* will enable expenditure to be made with a lavishness that is impossible in the case of a provincial paper standing alone, and it is only by lavish expenditure that a bright, up-to-date newspaper can be produced.

Its Main Aim is

NEWS

TRUE NEWS!
NEW NEWS!
ALL THE NEWS!

1D. 2

FIRST ISSUE

Tuesday, Oct. 22.

Order of your newsagent at once to prevent disappointment.

1D. 2

Is your photo on page 502?

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Short Stories That . . . . . Make You Laugh.

We devote every week space in *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a *P.W.* penknife to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case, the source MUST be stated. Attempts must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, October 21st. Postcards only, please. The prize of £1 1s. has been awarded this week to Mr. A. K. Rawlings, of 4 High Street, Barnes, whose contribution is denoted by a star thus.*

MAUD: "Yes, it's a pretty fan, isn't it? It was given me by my mother on my twenty-first birthday." Mabel: "Really! How well it has worn, dear."

"FIRST you had whooping cough, then you got the bronchitis, then influenza, and now you have jaundice. Seems to me you catch anything in your town," said Wiggles. "Yes," said the suburban dweller, "everything except the train I want."

ETHEL: "It was very embarrassing to-day when I got into the tram and found Mr. Trotter there. I was engaged to him this summer, but hadn't spoken to him since we got back to town." "What did you do?" Ethel: "Well, I made the best of it, and let him pay my fare."

"WHY do you look so sad, my love?" said Mr. Younghusband. "I was thinking of a poor little beggar child that came here this morning," replied Mrs. Y. "Just think, Charles, the poor child was only eight years old, and her father was killed in the Crimean War, and her mother died of sorrow within a year afterwards."

THEY had tried all the penny-in-the-slot machines on the pier, until at last they came to one that did not respond to the magic bronze. "Look here, my man," said Crumbles to the pier attendant, "that machine is to try your weight, the next your height, the next your strength, then your sight; and now I've put a penny in this thing, but I didn't see what it's for." "That, sir," replied the pierman. "Oh, that one's to try your temper."

A GENTLEMAN on a visit to a coal mine, thinking to take a rise out of the foreman, an Irishman, asked him the following question: "I say, Pat, how do you get the men up out of the pit?" Pat, seeing through the joke, answered: "Oh, we pull them up with the hair of the head." The gentleman looked at him a second or so, and then said, with a smile on his face: "Ha! but what about those with bald heads?" "Oh," says Pat. "we use suckers for them."

*THE farmers of Cape Colony are notoriously hard to move, but rarely have we come across a more sluggish specimen than that furnished by a lazy man, whose farm lies outside Worcester, C.C., and who called at a neighbour's house sometime ago. "Sit down, sit down!" exclaimed the neighbour. "I don't know as I ought," said the farmer, nevertheless he sat down. After half an hour's talk about the crops, and the value of an adjoining piece of ground, the farmer said slowly: "I don't know as I ought to be sitting here, I came over to see if I could get a ladder; our house is on fire."

CHARLEY: "Your eyes always remind me of the sea, Cis." Cis: "Because they are so blue?" Charley: "No. They are so watery!"

"WHAT are your hopes for the future?" asked the solemn man. "I have none at present," replied the youth. "To-morrow is my girl's birthday, and I am worrying about the present."

OLD BOY: "Thomas, if my wife asks you where I am, tell her I have gone to the office." Servant: "Certainly, sir! But where are you really going, in case anyone else should want to know?"

COAL MERCHANT: "I say, Premium, I want to insure my coal yard against fire. What's the cost of a policy for £10,000?" Insurance Agent: "What coal is it, same kind as you sent me last?" Merchant: "Yes, it is." Agent: "Oh! I wouldn't insure it if I were you. It won't burn."

MR. HARDCASH: "Well, sir, what induced you to imagine that I would give my consent to my daughter's marrying you?" De Gall: "Pardon me, my dear sir, I wasn't so foolish as to imagine anything of the kind. I merely asked for it as a matter of form. If you refuse, we shall marry without it, that's all."

A YOUNG lady was driven by her brother lately to West Muddleham Junction, where he was to see her off by train. They were rather late and had to hurry. The porter rapidly pushed her portmanteau under the seat first, and she sprang in, but first in her hurry and confusion she kissed the porter, and gave her brother twopence.

QUITE recently the authorities of a town in Yorkshire were engaged in a discussion as to the Sunday closing of public-houses. During the proceedings a prominent town councillor, not particularly renowned for his erudition, asked timidly what the difference was between a bona-fide traveller and a real traveller. He thought they were the same thing. "Not at all," came the reply from a fellow councillor. "A real traveller is thirsty because he travels, but a bona-fide traveller travels because he is thirsty."

DURING a football match between two village clubs near Lancaster recently, the referee gave a decision which was unappreciated by one of the linesmen. A rather lively discussion took place between the two as to the rules, the linesman finishing up by shouting at the official: "Go on wi' thee; thou can't referee for nuts!" "Can't I?" replied the referee. "But I can tell thee I refereed before ever thau wor born!" "That may be," replied the wily linesman, "but has thau ever refereed since?"

THE cannibalistic advertisement for a servant who could "cook and dress children" brings to mind one or two other misrepresentations of a similar kind. "Dine here and you will never dine anywhere else," is a starling, though doubtless meant to be alluring, statement which appeared in gigantic letters in the window of a cheap restaurant. "Wanted a room by two gentlemen about thirty feet long and twenty feet broad," suggests anatomical monstrosities, and there is something terribly sinister in this advertisement of a furrier, "Mr. Butcher begs to announce that he is willing to make up capes, jackets, etc., for ladies out of their own skins."

(Continued on page 503.)

New serial starts to-day.

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DO YOU WANT A £5 NOTE?

Five Crisp £5 Notes to be Given to Readers Every Week.

£25 per Week if you will ask for it.

HERE IS THE SCHEME.

We have in our possession a considerable number of photographs of men, women, and children of all grades of society secured for us by our agents, who have scoured the United Kingdom for this special purpose.

Each week we shall publish five of these portraits, and to each of the persons thus represented we shall dispatch the sum of £5, on his or her claiming same on a postcard addressed to

PORTRAIT DEPARTMENT, "SHORT STORIES,"
Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Although the persons whose portraits will appear in this competition are quite unknown to us personally, we have their names and addresses in our possession, and, therefore, a claim can be settled at once, without risk of fraud.

We may say that our agents are still at work all over the country. It is, therefore, possible that your portrait may appear without your knowing it at any moment. So you should watch SHORT STORIES.

HERE ARE FIVE PORTRAITS.

Is your portrait here? If so, drop us a post-card, and get £5. Five more portraits will appear next week.

All claims in connection with the portraits below must reach the address already given above by Tuesday next October 22nd.

Full names and addresses of the correct claimants will appear in succeeding numbers.

HOW TO MAKE A CLAIM FOR A £5 NOTE.

Simply write on a postcard these words:

The Portrait No..... (here put number of portrait) in the current number of SHORT STORIES is mine. Please forward a £5 note.
(Name and full address.)

Persons represented must claim for themselves. Claims made by other people on their behalf will be ignored.

No. 16

No. 17.

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"WOULD you oblige me," said the reporter, who gets novel interviews, "by telling me what book has helped you most in life?" And after a thoughtful pause the great man answered: "My bank-book."

"WONDERFULLY active old fellow that man Binks," said Cuffs. "He told me that his legs were so pliable he could kick himself in the back. I couldn't do that, and I'm not half his age." "You don't need to," said Hawkins. "Almost anybody would be glad to do it for you."

MISS COYGIRL: "Jack Softleigh told me last night that I ought to accept him because he was willing to prove his love for me." Her Friend: "What did you say?" Miss Coygirl: "I said I couldn't see it in that light." Her Friend: "Then what did he say?" Miss Coygirl: "Nothing. He just turned the light out."

A PASSER-BY stopped to look at a shop-window. "Walk in, sir," said the proprietor; "you will find anything you want inside." "I never buy at shops where the goods are not labelled." To which the shopkeeper (an old hand) replied: "We never label our articles, sir. Our prices are so low that people might think the goods were second-hand."

MR. SHARP: "I can make sixpence into ninepence." Bore: "How?" Mr. Sharp: "Give me sixpence. I'll show you." (The money changes hands.) Mr. Sharp: "Waiter! A threepenny cigar." (It is brought, and also the change, which Mr. Sharp hands to the Bore, who exclaims, "What's this?") Mr. Sharp: "You've got threepence, I've got threepence" (exhibiting cigar), "an i the landlord's got threepence. That's ninepence, isn't it? Good day."

"MY dear friend," said a long-haired man to the manager of a travelling show, "is that unfortunate being really a cannibal?" and he indicated a South Sea Islander from Cork who was sitting on a divan. "Yes, sir; that great living curiosity was captured while in the act of roasting a Presbyterian minister over a slow fire." "Great Heavens!" gasped the countryman. "Can't you convert him?" "Convert him?" said the showman, with disgust. "Do you suppose the great British public would pay threepence a head to see a Christian."

"MY husband is very nice, but he has a temper. Has yours?" "Oh, yes, but he is always losing it!"

HE: "How is one to tell that a love is only platonic?" She: "Oh, well, when it develops into the other kind you can look back and see the difference."

MRS. BROWN: "Men are not what they used to be, if there is any truth in the old stories. Men used to think so much of women that they would die for them." Brown: "That's nothing. Didn't I think enough of you, dear, to live with you?"

HE: "Only one, just a little one." She: "Oh, no! I have no wish to be added to the list of girls you have kissed." He: "I have never kissed a girl in my life." She: "Oh! Then I'm not going to let you serve your apprenticeship on me."

SYMS: "Ah! my boy, you are to be envied. An artist's life is an ideal one. The affairs of everyday life do not engross you." Daubers (whose pictures do not sell): "Not a bit. Why we sometimes entirely overlook such prosaic matters as breakfast and dinner."

BINGO: "While I was matching that ribbon for you to-day a man came in and threw down a bomb. There was a terrible explosion, several people were killed, and I barely escaped with my life." Mrs. Bingo (anxiously): "You didn't lose that piece of ribbon, did you?"

Two Five Pound Notes Captured.

OF the first five portraits published two correct claims have been received. The names and addresses of the correct claimants are:

Mr. HENRY R. PEAD (No. 2),
58 Newington Green N.;
and
Mr. R. H. ROBINSON (No. 4),
Post Office,
Queen's Square,
Bowness-on-Windermere

We have to congratulate heartily the two prize-winners, to whom £5 notes have been despatched, and to bid other readers keep a sharp look-out for similar good fortune.

No. 18.

No. 19.

No. 20.

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IN THE SERVICE OF THE TSAR.

THE room was dingy and but poorly lighted. Around the long table in its centre were gathered the conspirators —the men who had sworn to kill the Tsar. A strange-looking appearance they made in the flickering candle-light; some with fierce faces marked with the bitter lines of hunger and of hate; some with the enthusiastic and wrapt expression of dreamers; others with the cold impassivity of great generals. One of the last-mentioned, colder, more impassive than the rest, sat at the foot of the table, facing the President. His manner showed not the slightest nervousness, not the slightest exhilaration. Yet in an hour he meant to betray the men who sat about him to the horrors of a living death on the bleak plains of Siberia, gaining thereby the lasting favour of his Imperial master. The blow that would ruin his comrades would make him.

The clock struck eight as the President rose to speak.

"Brothers," he began, "brothers, we have all sworn the same sacred vows, we have all stood the severe tests of our order—we can all be trusted. It becomes my duty, therefore, to speak out. Our days of plotting are passed; the time for action has come. At last we shall strike a decisive blow for liberty."

He paused, but no one spoke. There was not a sound in the room. Some breathed a little more quickly—that was all. Pointing to a powder-keg in a corner, the President continued:

"Our materials are at hand—our opportunity also. The Tsar visits Krasmoe-Selo on Thursday——"

The noise of a scuffle in the hall outside the door interrupted him. Several of the men who sat about the table sprang to their feet, the door burst open, and an officer followed by a squad of soldiers, rushed into the room. In an instant every one of the conspirators was covered by a rifle.

"You are my prisoners!" said the officer curtly.

"By what right?" exclaimed the President. He alone seemed cool; the rest stood as though paralysed. Ignoring the President, the officers glanced at the others.

"Line up against the wall," he ordered.

Silently they obeyed him—powerless to resist. The officer turned to his men and gave a sharp order. The soldiers raised their guns and aimed them at the defenceless breasts of the prisoners.

Again the President spoke:

"What do you mean to do?" he cried.

"To execute you at once," returned the officer coldly. Then to the soldiers: "Take aim. Fi——"

"Stop!"

The cry rang out loud and clear in the deadly stillness of the room, and the spy sprang forward from where he stood against the wall.

"Stop!" he cried.

"Get back," said the officer sternly; but the spy continued to advance. His coldness, his impassiveness, had disappeared; his face was yellow with fear; his teeth chattered; great drops of sweat stood on his forehead.

"No—no—you must not shoot me!" he shrieked. "I am of yourselves—I am an agent of the Third Section. It was I who informed against these men. If you kill me it will be murder—murder—murder!" He grovelled on the floor at the officer's feet.

The doomed men looked at the miserable wretch with bitter contempt, while in the President's eyes there was something that looked like triumph.

"An agent of the police," said the officer doubtfully. "You have your credentials?"

"Yes—yes!" screamed the wretch, tearing a piece of paper from his pocket and handing it to the officer. "It is there—it is there. Ah! my God!"

This last exclamation was one of renewed terror, for the soldiers, dropping their rifles, had sprung upon him, and were binding him hand and foot.

The President stepped forward with a smile.

"Brothers," said he to the amazed men, who still stood against the wall, "brothers, in a great cause like ours we cannot be too careful. This little scene was devised to discover what traitors we had amongst us. It has succeeded. You, who have proved faithful, are quite safe."

The men looked at him as though they could scarcely credit their senses. Then one or two began to sob, and one man laughed.

"And this spy?" he questioned.

A fierce murmur ran round the room. The men, with one accord, started towards the corner where the man lay bound.

"Kill him! kill him!" they shouted.

The President raised his hand.

"Stop!" cried he; "the man is mine—mine to punish as I see fit. Leave him to me. You will accompany our brother Vassoloff," indicating the pseudo officer, "to a place of refuge. From our friend's admission we are no longer safe here."

"But——"

"I have spoken," said the President sternly.

The conspirators turned and silently went out. As the man who had laughed passed the spy, he kicked him in the face, and laughed again.

Then the President was alone with the spy. He stood looking at him for a moment, with a cruel smile on his white-bearded face. Presently he took from his pocket a long fuse, placed one end in the powder-keg, and wound the other about one of the tallow candles, an inch from the burning wick. Then he placed the candle in front of the spy's face, where he could almost touch it, and, turning, went to the door. At the threshold he paused.

"Your fate will be a lesson to your fellow spies," he said, and was gone. The spy heard his steps as he went down the passage; he counted them till they died away in the awful silence of the night. Then he looked at the candle. How long would it take an inch of tallow to burn? The police would not come till nine. Would it last till then? He looked at the clock. Twenty minutes past eight. Would that inch of tallow last forty minutes if it should not, would being blown up be so painful?

He looked at the candle again. It seemed to melt away before his eager gaze. He tried to shriek, but could not. The bruise on his face where the man had kicked him hurt fearfully; he became unconscious. He dreamed of his mother, dead years before. He thought that he was a child again, and that she had taken him on her lap, and was telling him the old stories that he loved. It was summer, and he could hear the reapers singing. . . . He laughed with happiness.

New serial starts to day.

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He opened his eyes. The darkness of the room frightened him, and he tried to call his mother. The gag was still in his mouth, and like a flash the whole dreadful sickening truth came back to him. The hands of the clock pointed to twenty minutes before nine, and the candle was more than half burned. He shook like a leaf; a dreadful nausea sickened him.

Again he looked at the clock. Ten minutes to nine. The candle seemed to burn slower. Was there still hope? Would the police come on time—would they come on time? He strained his ears to hear their coming, but there was no sound. Good God! would they be late?

It was five minutes to nine. He tried to pray. He was lost. No! At last he could hear the soldiers approaching; but the clock was striking nine. A knock on the door, and the flame had touched the fuse. He watched the spark as it crept like a snake across the floor, nearer, nearer, nearer to the keg. He tried to scream . . . The sound of a door being broken open. . . . The footsteps of men on the passage outside the door, but the spark had reached the keg! A flash——

* * * * *

A second later, when the soldiers entered, they saw a sight that frightened even them, used to fearful sights as they were. A dead man, bound and gagged, lay upon the floor. His face was green with terror, his hair snow-white, and his eyes red, staring, and protruding.

On the floor was the black mark where the fuse had burned, and in one corner was a powder-keg—empty!

BY THE BALTIC.

"LIESCHEN, child, I must say adieu. I know not when I shall see thee again."

"Adieu, then, Gustav. A pleasant journey to you! If you didn't come back for fifty years you would find me still here, milking the cows and attending to the household. Life here is much the same year by year."

"And thou would'st not fret, Lieschen, if I did not come for fifty years?"

He spoke as though he scarcely knew whether to jest or be in earnest, and stood watching her with a wistful, doubtful smile. She was making buttermilk cheeses at the dresser by the scullery window, and he was leaning in over the window-sill, with a pipe smouldering in one hand, while the other kept breaking off little twigs and leaves of the roses that clambered all round the window, and made a pretty frame to his sunburnt face and broad shoulders.

Lieschen laughed at his question, as she shaped the little white cheeses all speckled over with carraway-seeds, and did not look up.

"You would be about a hundred years old then, Gustav, I should think," was the only remark she made.

"No, come, Lieschen, that is cruel of you. I am only thirty-eight—more than twice your age, it is true, but not nearly fifty. And it is something to have a fine farm and a good new house, and the only carriage on Rugen, even if your husband *is* old enough to know white from black."

"Yes, I know," said Lieschen, indifferently, "but there is plenty of time yet."

Gustav Baier bit his lip and frowned uneasily as he looked at her.

"Thou dost not care, Lieschen, 'tis plain to see," he said bitterly. "I think thou hast no heart at all, for all thine eyes are so sweet and thy ways so gentle. Thou'rt some mermaiden from the sea here, and one day wilt vanish like the foam. Is it not so?"

"I didn't make myself," retorted the girl, petulantly, "and I never asked you to come and fall in love with me. If you're not satisfied"—she drew the gold betrothal ring from her finger—"here's your ring. Give it to somebody that has a heart for you."

He left the window abruptly, and she glanced up flushed and frightened, not knowing what he meant to do. The next minute he came in at the door from the yard, and went up to the table where she stood with the ring in her open hand.

"Come, come, we mustn't quarrel," he said, peacably, replacing the ring, and drawing her on his knee as he sat on the dresser. "I shall not be satisfied till that ring is on the other hand, and you come away home with me. Give me a kiss now, and say you love me."

Lieschen hung her head, and her big brown eyes filled with tears.

"What, crying!" he remonstrated, taking her chin in his great rough hand, and turning her unwilling face round towards him. "Thunder and lightning, why, so she is! You spoil those eyes, my pretty one. What's it all about? Art not happy, Lieschen?"

"Yes, quite," she said with a gulp, "if you would let me alone, Gustav. I am yours now—what more do you want? You say I have no heart; I can't give you what I haven't got."

"Why, that's true. Give me kisses instead, then," said he magnanimously—"enough for fifty years, in case I do not see thee again."

"Stupid old Gustav!" cried the girl laughing and struggling. "There, that will do! Put me down, Gustav."

"*Ach!* See, now, these lovers, these lovers!" cried an old shrill voice in the doorway. "Tears and smiles and kisses, kisses and smiles and tears! So runs the world away, and the old folk are forgotten."

"Lieschen counts me one of the old folk, nurse," remarked Gustav, pausing to speak, but holding his prisoner helpless the while in his great strong arms.

"Tut, tut, child! Not many maidens of sixteen can boast such a fine, brave lover as thine, with his broad farm and his grand new house and steading, and everything heart can desire. Not but what thou canst bring him linen enough to stock the house, were it twice the size it is; but he had no need to seek out a simple child like thee to be his bride."

"So I tell him, nurse. I didn't want him—— O Gustav!" Her speech was smothered in his great, red beard.

"Good-bye, dearest!" he said at last, putting her down. "Take care of her for me, nurse. I don't think it will be fifty years before I come again," he added,

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turning to Lieschen as he went out; "though to me, at least, it will seem twice as long."

Perhaps the wistful look in his eyes, or the sadness that crept into his voice as he said these last words, touched the girl—perhaps she loved him after all; anyhow, before he had crossed the threshold, she ran after him, and slipped her hand into his.

"I'll go as far as the gate with you, Gustav," she said; and they walked away down the yard together.

"Look at my young ducks, Gustav; aren't they growing fast? and the chickens, too! And look at those lazy geese; they do nothing but feed and sleep. Do you know, I brought them all up, every one of them."

"Ay, thou'rt a brave housewife, Lieschen; and if thou lovest thy father now, and servest him so well, I doubt not thou'lt love me when the time comes. Adieu! *Herzliebchen!* Be good and happy, and don't forget me—eh?"

"No, you dear, good Gustav! Adieu! Come soon again!" And so they parted.

"Nurse," said Lieschen, re-entering the scullery, "how do people come to have hearts?"

"Good gracious! What does the child mean? Hearts? Why, they are born so!" exclaimed the old woman taking off her spectacles, the better to see her young questioner. "What art thou chattering about!"

"Gustav says I have no heart, nurse," she replied, sitting on the old woman's knee and stroking her white hair; "and I think he is right. How do we get a heart?"

"Herr Gustav should rejoice that thou hast none," said the old nurse, looking thoughtfully into the bright young face with her dim eyes; "it comes by suffering—suffering and sorrow and trial and weeping and loving—loving brings it all. They say the heart is like the steel in iron, 'tis there, but you cannot have it till it has gone through the terrible fires and been beaten on the anvil. The good God save thee from finding thine; for truly I think 'twould be thy death, my little flower."

"But see," she said, pointing to the window, "is it not that the Gustav come back again? Run, child, and see what brings him."

Lieschen ran out into the yard, but stopped suddenly short, petrified with fear at the sight that met her eyes.

"Bring him in—so—gently," Gustav was saying; and two farm-servants followed him, bearing between them the apparently lifeless body of a young man—the head fallen back, the eyes closed, the lips parted, the hands hanging limply down, the clothes stained here and there with blood.

"Run away, child, run away! 'tis no sight for thee," Gustav called out, when he saw her standing there white and frightened. "We want the nurse."

Then he turned to the old woman, who had come out, and explained rapidly, Lieschen, instead of running away, listened eagerly to every word.

"There has been a duel—unless it was darker work. We found him in the wood up yonder, bleeding to death. Where can we lay him down? The nearer the better—here, on this sofa?"

"Oh, anywhere—yes!" cried Lieschen, brimming over with pity.

And so they laid him down on the sofa in the little sitting-room, and then Gustav not unkindly, but quite irresistibly, put Lieschen outside the door.

Soon the old nurse came out hurriedly. Her eye fell upon the girl's white face, and she sent her to fetch a bundle of old linen from the press in the garret, as quick as might be, while she herself went for water.

When Lieschen came flying back, the nurse had returned to the side of the wounded man, and she stole in after her with the linen. She could hardly repress the cry of pain and pity that rose to her lips when she saw the death-like pallor of the face lying back on Gustav's supporting shoulder; but she felt that she must be very quiet if she would not draw attention to the fact that she had come in unbidden.

The nurse took the linen from her hands, without noticing her at all; and then Gustav helping with his disengaged hand gently unfastened and laid open the young man's coat, disclosing a white shirt all soaked in blood.

"Cut it—cut it!" said Gustav impatiently; "there's no time to lose."

"What a pity! and the linen so fair and fine," lamented the nurse, in an undertone. "The lad is noble, no doubt."

"No doubt," echoed Gustav; "but, noble or not, he must die if we can't staunch this bleeding at once. If only I had both hands free!" he muttered, exasperated at the tremulous slowness of the old woman. "This won't do; and not a soul in the house to help. Here, Lieschen, you must be useful. Come and hold his head—so, so—upon your shoulder. Lucky I've seen much of this in the war, and know what to be at," he remarked to himself. And Lieschen knelt and took the heavy fainting head upon her bosom, and closed her eyes to shut out the sight of blood that almost overcame her.

"Yes, he is noble," she thought to herself, trying to keep still and patient under the weight that began to make her limbs ache and tremble. "His hair is like the sunshine, and all waving—like that picture of an angel in my bible," she thought noting him curiously; "and his forehead is so white that the veins show through. No doubt he is an officer"—this she merely inferred from "the knightly growth that fringed his upper lip."—"and how beautiful he is! Gustav is handsome but not like him"; and she could almost have laughed at the idea of a comparison between great broad Gustav, with his sun-browned face, fine rough-hewn features, and big red beard, and the delicate refinement and almost womanly fairness of the other face.

At length Gustav released her, and laid the lad, as he called him—he looked about five-and-twenty—gently down on the pillows.

"He may do now," he said, after watching him a little while. "I must leave him to your care, nurse, and that of Herr Uterhart. You will explain it—what little we know—when he returns to-night. Good-bye, heart's darling! Thou'lt be a first-rate nurse ere I come again"; and he kissed his betrothed on either cheek and went away.

It was drawing towards evening. A familiar clatter of wooden shoes on the stones outside warned Lieschen that it was time to go a-milking. She stole out, tied on her great sun-bonnet, took up her stool and pail, and followed the women away to the meadows, as she did morning and evening all the summer through.

The shadows were growing very long and the colours fading in the western sky when they came back; and Lieschen still had her young ducks and fowls to shut

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up for the night. As she crossed and recrossed the yard—now with a can of water, now with the pail and stool ready for the morning—she sang in a shrill sweet voice some of those lovely plaintive Volkslieder—those "songs of love and longing," of endless wandering, seeking, and yearning, that have sprung from the heart of the German people.

Before going into the house, all her work done, she wandered down on to the sea-shore, and stood there dreamily looking over the smooth water into the fading sky, and listening to the splash of the little waves falling on the sand. She thought of what Gustav had said about the mermaiden, and thought it would be sweet to float away on the quiet tide, under the glimmering sky, and see the little stars light up one after another in the glimmering green up there, and watch the flights of birds winging over, and sing beside the boats of fishermen at their nightly toil, and dip down at sunrise—down, down among sea-weed forests, where strange wild creatures swim in and out, and the sea-flowers bloom, and the mermaidens sit combing their long golden hair under the tideless Baltic sea.

She was a strange, romantic child, this Lieschen, full of dreams and longings and fancies; and this seemed better to her than to be a creature of flesh and blood, with a human heart and human hope, and blessed with the love of man.

"And they live three hundred years," she murmured half-aloud, as the light died off the sea, "unless they strive to win an immortal soul by the love of a living man; if they fail they vanish into the sea-foam on the day when he weds another. But there is never, never found a man. He gives his love to a creature of his own sphere, and the foam ever gathers on the sea. If I were a mermaid, though," a shy, proud smile gleamed over her face, "I would not fail."

Lieschen was sitting in the sick room one hot summer afternoon, her patient asleep on the couch, and the warm fragrant air floating in with the murmuring of bees at the open window.

Her work lay in her lap, but her hands were idle, and her eyes gazing dreamily out at the sky, while very, very low and softly she sang, "War ich ein Vogelin."

"Brava, brava!" murmured a voice from the couch behind her. "A sweet voice and a sweet song!"

Lieschen coloured at his praise, and went and knelt by his side.

"I thought you were asleep. You are stronger—you feel better; life is coming back!" she said, in a voice quite tremulous with joy. "You have been so ill, do you not know it?"

He smiled faintly.

"How long have I been here?" he asked.

"Nearly three weeks," she answered. "See, how thin!" and she lifted up the hand that lay on the coverlet, and showed him how wasted it had grown.

He looked at it with a languid sort of curiosity, and then let it fall heavily by his side, and turned his head on the pillow to look at her.

She was a good sight for sick eyes to rest upon, with her pretty brown hair and great gentle brown eyes so full of womanly pity, tenderness, and submission, and, withal, dreamy and wistful as a child's eyes.

"And who art thou, dear child?" he asked presently.

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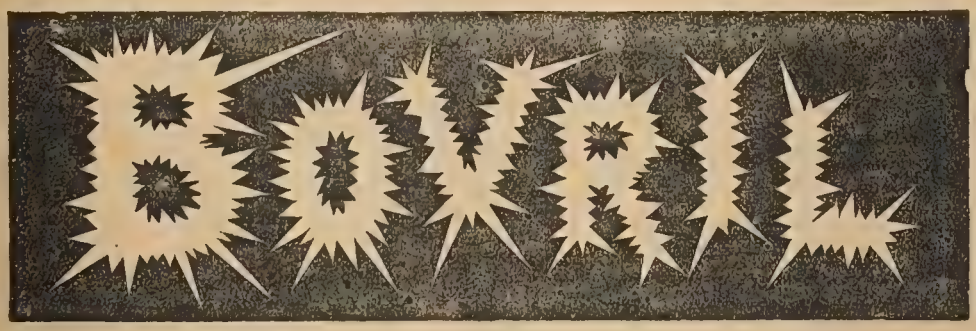

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"And hast thou nursed me all these weeks?"

"Yes," she answered, "and I have prayed for you when I thought you were dying, and see, the dear Lord has heard. You live, and you will grow strong again."

"Dear child! I owe thee my life. What can I give thee or do for thee?"

Lieschen blushed, her eyes faltered from his face, and she looked down in silence.

"Indeed, I know not; 'tis nothing I have done, only watching," stammered Lieschen. "Tell me your name," and she once more raised her eyes to his.

He tried to hold out his hand, and she put hers into it.

"Let be, then," he said slowly; "there is time enough. My name? My name is Otto von der Lauken; I——"

"*Ach!* You are tired," interrupted the girl, seeing a helpless look come into his eyes as he broke off. "Drink this, and do not speak any more."

She raised his head with one arm, and he drank the milk she held to his lips. Then she laid him down upon the pillows, and went back to her seat by the window, he watching her with the idle look of a man still too weak to speculate about things, or think any thoughts, but one or two that seemed of themselves to pass in and out of his brain.

Lieschen smiled, and shook her head at him.

"Shut your eyes and sleep," said she, with a pretty little authoritative air.

"Sing, then," he murmured, inclined to dictate his own terms, and watching her every gesture with passive enjoyment; "sing to me."

Lieschen could think of no song but the one she had been singing when he woke, which was still running in her head, and she sang it:

"Ach! wie ist's moglich dann
Dass ich Dich lassen kann?"

"Ah! can it ever be
That I should part from thee?"

When she had finished she turned and looked at him, and saw tears standing in his eyes.

"'Tis very sweet,' he murmured, "and plain to see that thou knowest what love is. Sing again—the last verse again."

So she sang it again:

"Were I a birdie wee,
And by thy side would be,
Fearing nor hawk nor kite,
To thee swift I'd fly.
Pierced by the hunter's dart,
I'd nestle next thy heart:
If one tear dimmed thy eye,
Glad then I'd die."

And he closed his eyes and slept.

So the slow summer days went by. Every day he grew a little stronger, and by degrees she gathered from him the story of the duel which had so nearly been fatal to him; how he and his friend had quarrelled about a lady, and had fought.

"I suppose they thought me dead, and left me," said Otto. "One has not much time to waste on these occasions. Poor Rudolf! He will have fled; but he can come back now, since no harm is done."

"And the lady?" asked Lieschen, breathlessly.

"She will marry Rudolf, no doubt," replied Otto, with a hard laugh; "and I shall dance at the wedding."

Lieschen said nothing; but the great dark eyes that rested on his face were lighted with a new fire, a burning worship; an unspeakable devotion; her heart beat, and her pulses thrilled with a new, sweet, mysterious pain. The die was cast.

At last there came a day—Oh, those days, those few

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days that make up the earthly history of a life! Some all in white, and garlanded with fresh flowers of spring; some flaming in gold and crowned with sunshine; some—some there must be—draped deep in black. There they are, within the veiled future, coming slowly, surely on, each in its appointed time, neither sooner for our longing, nor later for our agony of fear; and we cannot choose but take them all and bear them until the last sands have run, and there are no more. There came a day when O to vonder Lanken Jade farewell. He went through the garden looking for his little nurse, to say good-bye to her. Then he saw little footmarks in the sandy path, under the roses and syringas, that led down on to the shore. He followed them, and found Lieschen standing by the tide, looking out to sea.

"Lieschen," he said, coming up to her, "I am come to say goodbye!"

"Oh, not to-day!" cried Lieschen, clasping her hands and looking up at him with her great, piteous eyes. "Not so soon!"

"I am well again, and strong now," he answered, "thanks to my good little Li schen; and it is time to be up and doing. And now," he added, seeing the tears rush to her eyes, "now what can I do for thee, sweet child? Ask what thou wilt."

She looked up at him a moment, standing there, so tall and straight and fair, with the sun on his bright hair and the blue sky shining in his eyes; and then she put her hands over her face, and sobbed aloud like a child.

Then he drew a step nearer. "Dear little Lieschen, don't cry, for pity's sake! What can I do for thee? Tell me."

"Oh, give me your love—your love!" she cried passionately. "Love me, if only a little!" and then she broke down utterly, and leaned her little brown head against his arm, crying bitterly.

"Why, that thou hast, dear one—not a little, but a great deal. Who could help loving thee?" he answered soothingly. "Ask something harder for my love thou hast."

After a long pause, she looked up through her tears.

"And thou wilt—thou wilt come back one day?"

"Why, surely," said he, "I am not worth all these tears, pretty one! Be happy, right happy, till I come again. Adieu now, sweet child!"

He stooped and kissed her on the forehead, and went away up the sand, turning under the syringas to wave another farewell, and then she heard his horse's hoofs clattering up the yard, and he was gone.

Gone! How it haunted her day after day as she passed in and out of the house, empty of his presence; down the garden and the meadows, which knew his step and voice no more; and upon the shore, where he had bidden her farewell! Weeks passed before she at all turned from the feeling of missing him so sorely to the hope of his return.

But he did not come—not even when it was spring and the early leaves came out, and the clouds lifted and shone white in the young sunshine, and the birds sang merrily.

Gustav came and went, and began to urge the marriage. Perhaps he saw that his betrothed was losing the pretty roses in her cheeks, and that the light in her eyes was growing sad and strange; and he—knowing, as none but he knew, how much he loved her—longed to take her to himself in his own home, and make her happy.

So they fixed a day at last, and Lieschen, like one in a dream, helped the old nurse to make all the preparations, and plied her needle busily.

All was ready at length, and two days before the wedding Lieschen stood on the shore, her work done, and

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"I felt languid and too weary and weak to do anything. My joints ached as if I had rheumatism all over me, and many a time I had difficulty in keeping up with my duties. I began to suffer from biliousness, too, and to experience a nasty sharp pain at my heart. This pain continued to get worse. Whenever I moved quickly it commenced, and I had to go slowly to get ease. So bad did it become at last that I felt convinced I had heart disease. Of course, I tried to get relief, and purchased all kinds of medicines in vain until I tried Chas. Forde's Bile Beans for Biliousness. The result was most satisfactory. I noticed an improvement after the first few doses, and so went on taking them.

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no more to do but wait now for the dawning of the day that was to bring Gustav and make her his wife.

As she stood there she seemed to hear a voice answering her own thoughts:

"Thou wilt lose all, bethink thee well—all if thou fail. Thy father's love thy peaceful home, thy fair name, thy good, honest husband—all will be lost!"

"Alas, alas, I know it!" she answered weeping; "but I cannot, I will not fail!"

She went into the house and looked into the sitting-room. There sat her father in his chair asleep, the pipe still between his fingers, and the room dim with smoke. Her lips seemed to frame some word they vainly sought to utter, and then with a choking, stifled sob, she turned and stole away—away out of the house, across the meadows, and on towards the shore of the other side of the promontory on which lay her father's farm.

She was not strong, but something within her gave her power to walk all night in the chill spring weather. Long before noon the next day she had caught the Stralsund steamer on its backward way, and was being carried across the water to Stralsund.

She felt no weariness, no hunger, thirst, or cold, and only longed to be on foot once more. She was quite familiar with the quaint town, and hurried up the quay, across the Water Street, and up under the dark, shadowy Semlower Gateway, along the quiet streets where grass grows between the stones of the pavement, and the old gabled houses have looked down for hundreds of years upon the simple burgher-life below. She went through the town and out into the country beyond, past many a pleasant little farm where the storks were patching up their great nests on the thatched barns and cow-houses, and making their curious rattling cry as they flew to and fro.

She remembered that the storks used to bring the summer in old days, and all good gifts when they came back, and that this spring they had not yet come to her home on Rügen.

In one little village she asked for a drink of milk, and they made her eat and rest a little while; but she was restless and anxious to be gone so they let her go, though the wind was rising and blowing sharp and keen, and little flakes of snow were flying through the air.

By nightfall a fierce storm was blowing, and the air was thick with driving snow. Lieschen asked shelter at a farm lying a little back from the high road.

"How far is it to Friedenhagen?" she asked.

"What, hast thou friends at Friedenhagen? In the service of the Count von der Lanken, then?"

"Yes, I have a friend there," answered the girl, with a faint smile. "Is it far now?"

"Why, thou wilt not walk it, surely? 'Tis a good four hours from here."

"Oh, I am very strong," answered Lieschen bravely. "Only let me sleep here, and then I shall be able to do it."

So she slept there; but very early in the morning she rose and stole away, out on to the snowy road in the cutting pitiless wind, leaving behind her, as a token of her gratitude, the only thing she had to give—her betrothal ring.

"She has a sad story, doubtless, poor thing!" said the good people, shaking their heads over it; and they put it away, and forgot all about it and her.

Meanwhile, she pressed on till it was drawing towards noon; and then the walls and turrets of the great Schloss Friedenhagen rose dimly through the falling snow. At every step her tired feet grew heavier, the snow glared upon her aching eyes, and the cold wind seemed to pierce her through and through: but still she struggled on, and stood at length under the great *porte-cochère*, and rang the bell.

She had no thought of her soiled and draggled clothes, or of the impression she might make upon the servants; no thought at all of them, but only of him, of Otto von der Lanken, and that another moment must bring them face to face.

She heard bells ringing merrily—was it only phantom music in her tired brain? And then the door opened, and a rough voice demanded her business and her name.

"Who are you, and what are you here about on such a day as this?"

Lieschen vaguely fancied he was referring to the snow, and timidly asked to see the young Herr Graf.

The man laughed aloud.

"A pretty request truly! Come another day, mein Fräulein. Know you not that the young Herr Graf has just brought home his bride, and is to-day receiving the congratulations of all his noble friends? The gracious lord would be somewhat astonished, I take it, to see a beggar maiden like you among the train. Make way, make way," and he pushed her hastily aside as a gay carriage came rolling up the drive.

Lieschen turned away faint, stunned, exhausted, broken-hearted; and the guests went laughing and chatting up the steps and into the great hall, and the door was shut.

Two days later a big, broad-shouldered man with a sun-browned face and red beard, came riding along the snowy road towards Friedenhagen. The storm was over, but the great drifts still lay piled by the roadside, deep and broad and white. The green buds of spring were withered on the boughs; sullen clouds moved slow against the leaden sky and huddled in great banks about the south and west. It was freezing, but the bitter wind was still. The horseman's face was sad and stern, and he looked absently at the snow as he rode along, when suddenly a great cry broke from his lips. He flung down the reins and sprung to the ground.

"Lieschen, Lieschen, my little Lieschen!"

For there, covered but not hidden by the snow, he discovered something—something that told him all, almost before his eyes had fully seen it—a few shadows, a few curved lines, a sweeping tress of dark brown hair. He fell down beside the still, unheeding form, and put back the matted hair that was blown across the face, and kissed the frozen eyes, and frozen parted lips, the little frozen hands in vain; dead, stark dead, his little Lieschen—frozen in the drifted snow!

This was the end of it all. He saw his ring was gone from her finger, but how or why he could not guess. He only knew she had fled from her wedding day and from him, and dimly felt that Otto von der Lanken might be the cause—whether innocent or guilty he could not tell, and littled cared to know, since all was lost.

And Otto von der Lanken never knew.

"That pretty child will have forgotten me," he said once to himself that spring, when something reminded him of his promise at parting from her, "and will have married the good Baier by this time, or I might send for her to wait upon my wife."

Turn to page 482 at once.

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

A New Serial Story begins in this number. It is written by Mr. H. T. Johnson, one of the most popular authors of the day. You will find it to be a thoroughly fascinating novel from the first to the last line. Personally, I read it with breathless interest when it was first placed in my hands, and more recently, on a second reading, I have found my pleasure has not waned. To my mind, it is one of the best things Mr. Johnson has ever written, and that's saying a good deal.

The interest in the photo competition grows apace, and looks like proving a huge success. For the first five portraits published several claims came to hand. These were duly investigated, with the result that the two gentlemen whose names are given on page 503 each captured a five-pound note. They are to be congratulated on being the originals of portraits Nos. 2 and 4. The other claims were found to be incorrect. We are sorry, because we are simply dying to get rid of some more fivers. If your portrait isn't on page 502 don't get disheartened. There are a lot to be published yet.

Advice to Readers on Various Matters.

(Replies to Correspondents.)

"Pater" has a little boy who is afflicted with stammering, and he asks if I can suggest a cure.

Stammering is the result of a highly nervous temperament. Sufferers, in their great haste to speak, send so much energy to the vocal organs that these cannot act fast enough for the voice to escape, and the result is confusion. In the case of children, care should be taken of their general health, and those who are with them most should talk gently and slowly, carefully pronouncing each syllable. It is a great mistake to correct children for stammering; instead, they should be encouraged to open their mouths and take in breath before beginning to speak slowly and softly. Persons of all ages who stammer will derive great benefit from reading aloud carefully (especially books with conversations, etc.) and seldom reading to themselves without forming each word with the mouth.

"J. P." wishes to know a cure for sea-sickness.

Bromide of potassium taken in large doses before sailing, and in small doses after, is said to be one of the best remedies for the prevention of sea-sickness. Another plan which is supposed to be infallible is to rub the head immediately at the back of the ears until the skin is slightly excoriated, as this excites a certain nerve on which it is thought that sea-sickness is dependent. Persons who advance this theory for the cure of sea-sickness strengthen their claim to its efficacy by the fact that deaf mutes in whom the nerve thus agitated does not exist, never suffer from this distressing complaint. There is one consolation for those who are like the boy who complained that his dinner wouldn't stay swallowed, and that is that sea sickness is supposed to do you a world of good, but it would take a miracle to convince anyone suffering from the malady of this fact.

"Postscript" has a large quantity of postage stamps, British and foreign. They are of no use to a collector, being of the common varieties only, and he asks me if I know of any use to which they can be put.

He might, with a little trouble, transform them into very pretty decorative mosaic work. The first thing is to thoroughly soak them, so that they no longer adhere to the paper, and the best way is to immerse them in water for some time. Then proceed to arrange them in geometrical patterns, cutting some diagonally across where the design needs it, or in halves. They can be adapted to the designs published for patchwork. The chief point to aim at is to select a good pattern, to keep it uniform, and to blend the colouring well. When these have been mastered it is very ornamental work, applied to the tops of tables, small cabinets, boxes, frames, letter-cases, screens, etc. It requires to be sized, and varnished with clear crystal varnish

Yes, "J. P.," it is quite true that only about one out of every three or four hundred bullets fired in a battle is effective. Here are an expert's statistics on the question. When Frederick the Great defeated the Austrians at the battle of Hanslau, May 17th, 1742, out of every 357 shots fired by the Prussians only one Austrian was killed or wounded. In the campaigns of 1805 and 1806, when the great Napoleon was victorious everywhere, only one man was killed or wounded out of every 3,000 shots, and in 1813 and 1814, 10,000 shots were fired to kill or wound one man. Bautzen was an exception, for there 714 balls were fired for one man *hors de combat*. At the battle of Vittoria, Wellington's army fired 500 shots for one man killed or wounded. At Solferino in 1859 the Austrians fired 8,400,000 cartridges, and only killed and wounded 12 000 French soldiers, or one man out of every 700 shots. In the campaign of 1864 and 1866 the average was sixty-six shots for one man *hors de combat*. In the terrible battles of 1870-21, 250 shots were fired for every man killed or wounded.

TO CONTRIBUTORS.

I am open to consider original stories of any length from 1,500 to 6,000 words. The character of stories required may be best ascertained by a careful reading of the contents of the paper. All MSS. are dealt with promptly, and every effort is made to return rejected stories which are accompanied by stamped addressed envelopes. At the same time, I cannot hold myself responsible for MSS. accidentally lost. Communications of this kind should be addressed The Editor, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, Strand, W.C.

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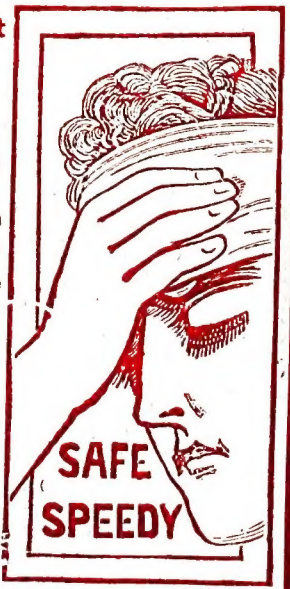

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